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THIRD SERIES

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CHAPTER LIII.

JULIANA.

LADY SAXONDALE retained her station upon one sofa, while Constance remained upon the other until dinner was announced.

"Now," said her ladyship advancing towards her daughter and speaking in a low hurried voice as the servant held the door open for them to pass out, "you may or you may not, just as you choose, tell Juliana what has taken place. It will not alter my resolves one atom. But for your own sake I should advise you to maintain a composed demeanour in the presence of the domestics."

Constance said not a word, but rising from her seat, accompanied her mother from the apartment. They descended the magnificent staircase to the dining-room, where covers were laid for four. Edmund was not however there: but Juliana almost immediately made her appearance—and the three sat down to table. The elder sister,—who had kept her own room the whole day until this hour, for the purpose of as much as possible avoiding the mother whom she now hated,—immediately saw that there was something wrong with Constance: but she of course waited for a suitable opportunity to inquire the reason. The dinner passed over—desert was placed upon the table—and the domestics then withdrew. The conversation, which had only been maintained for the sake of appearance in the presence of the servants, and which was even then languid enough, now ceased altogether. Juliana waited in the expectation that her mother would soon quit the table and retire to the drawing-room, as was her wont: but no—lady Saxondale sat fast. Constance looked thoroughly unhappy: and Juliana's curiosity as well as anxiety being excited, she said to her sister, "Will you come and practise a little?"

But Constance only shook her head at her sister, and threw a deprecating look at her mother. Juliana was now completely mystified; and after another long interval of silence, she said, "Is anything the matter, Constance? You certainly are not yourself this evening."

"Ask our mother for an explanation," was the young lady's reply, delivered in a sudden paroxysm of bitterness.

But Juliana, who now considered herself altogether at variance with Lady Saxondale, did not choose to make any approach towards a real conversational footing: for as above stated, the few remarks she had made while the footmen were present, were only for the sake of appearances. She lingered however to see whether her mother would say anything of her own accord: but Lady Saxondale shut herself up in a cold reserve and a freezing silence. Juliana, thinking that if she retired Constance would follow her, rose from the table and quitted the room.

This conduct on her elder daughter's part was precisely what Lady Saxondale reckoned upon. She knew that Juliana would not condescend to ask explanations of her relative to the melancholy appearance of Constance; and she felt equally well assured that Constance herself would not open the whole controversy in her (Lady Saxondale's) presence. Thus her ladyship calculated that she should be enabled to prevent her elder daughter from learning the cause of the younger one's sorrow, and that thus she would not have the power of rendering her any assistance in communicating with the Marquis of Villebelle.

"We will remain here, or retire to the drawing-room, whichever you please," said her ladyship to Constance, as soon as Juliana had left the apartment.

Change of scene—change of place—anything for a distraction in the present state of mind in which the young lady found herself! She therefore rose from her seat, and accompanied her mother up to the drawing-room. Juliana was not there: she had again retired to her own chamber in the hope that Constance would come to her. When coffee was served up, a message was sent to Miss Farefield to announce that it was in readiness. This message was borne by Mary-Anne; and having delivered it, she lingered in the room with an evident anxiety to say something. Juliana accordingly questioned her; and Mary-Anne, frankly confessing that she had listened at the door in consequence of observing how strange Miss Constance looked, told Juliana all that had passed.

"Ah! is it so?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale's elder daughter. "We must defeat this scheme of my mother's. Hasten, Mary-Anne, to the Marquis of Villebelle's lodging--tell him what has occurred——"

"I have already been, Miss," responded the lady's maid. "I went while you were at dinner. The Marquis was terribly excited: but I soothed and cheered him by the asssurances that something should be devised to help Miss Constance to freedom. He will not stir out, but will wait at home all this evening and all day to-morrow for any message or tidings that I may bring him. I suppose you know, Miss, that the traveliing-carriage is ordered to be sent to the coachmaker's the first thing to-morrow, to be put in good order and have the wheels looked to ready for a journey? It is to be sent back by to-morrow evening, so as to be in readiness for the following morning."

"Then her ladyship is going to take us off into Lincolnshire?" said Juliana. "Very well: we shall see. The moment positive orders are given as to the hour when the carriage is to start, let me know. I will then tell you how we shall act."

Marry-Anne promised obedience; and Juliana remained for a few minutes longer in her chamber ere she descended to the drawing-room.

"And so my mother proposes to take us into the solitude of that dull old castle?" she said to herself when Mary-Anne had retired. "She thinks that she will coerce Constance into accompanying her; and she knows very well that for decency's sake I must go also. She reasons that I dare not remain behind to inhabit this house by myself, while my mother and sister are elsewhere. And she reasons rightly. I must guard my reputation—I must endeavour to settle myself in marriage—I must obtain an independent position in order to escape from the thraldom of this tyrant-parent. The first old peer or wealthy old commoner who may propose, shall be accepted: then will I find out my beloved Francis again, and secretly may we see each other. But in the meantime poor Constance must be restored to freedom. There is now no alternative for her but to fly to the Marquis of Villebelle."

Having thus settled her plans, Miss Farefield descended to the drawing-room. Lady Saxondale took no notice of her; and therefore it was not difficult for Juliana to make a rapid sign which seemed to be fraught with hope—but how or of what kind Constance for the life of her could not possibly conjecture. Another rapid sign made her comprehend the importance of preventing their mother from perceiving that this intelligence was passing between them; and Constance accordingly appeared to relapse into her mournful mood. The evening passed away dreary enough: at half-past ten o'clock Juliana rose from her seat, and observing to Constance that she was tired, quitted the room without taking the least notice of her mother.

"Whenever it suits you to retire,

Constance," said Lady Saxondale, a few minutes afterwards, "I am ready: but you can do exactly as you like. If you choose to sit up till midnight, I am indifferent."

"I will go at once," replied Constance, wearied in mind and in body: for the fatigue of the former frequently operates thus upon the physical energies.

Lady Saxondale and Constance accordingly ascended to the suite of chambers belonging to the former: and declining any attendance of the lady's-maids, for fear that Constance might find an opportunity of whispering something in the ear of any one of them, Lady Saxondale locked herself in with her daughter—taking good care to conceal the key in such a way that there was no chance of Constance rising stealthily in the night and discovering it.

On the following morning, when they arose, her ladyship continued to exercise the same vigilance over her younger daughter,—never losing sight of her—scarcely even moving away from her side—and inwardly rejoicing at the idea that things still wore on thus without any explanation being given by Constance to Juliana. After breakfast, just as the latter was rising from the table to leave the room, Lady Saxondale said in a cold voice, "Miss Farefield, I am going into Lincolnshire to-morrow, Constance will accompany me. I presume that you also will proceed thither with us?"

"It suits me as well to be in Lincolnshire as in London," answered Juliana, in a voice as glacial as that of her parent.

She then left the breakfast-parlour; and as she was passing across the hall to reach the staircase, she perceived Edmund entering by the front-door at the moment. He had a very dissipated look—his garments were in disorder—and he seemed as if he had been up the whole night.

"Well, Julie," he said, in his usual flippant manner, "how are you? I suppose you think I'm a perfect stranger?"—and he gave a tipsy hiccup.

"Come this way, Edmund," said his elder sister, beckoning him somewhat mysteriously. "I want to speak to you."

They accordingly passed into the dining-room, and Juliana, making a sign for her brother to close the door, said to him, "Do you know that we are all going into Lincolnshire to morrow morning?"

"Who's going?" asked Edmund, with a yawn. "Not I, by Jove! that's very certain. Our lady-mother and you two girls may go if you like: but I'll be hanged if I do. I am my own master now, thank heaven! and I mean to let people see it. You don't know what a jolly lark I've had during the past night. I and Harold pretty nearly killed a policeman between us: but I don't think that we were known—and, at all events, we got clear off."

"I suppose you have not been in bed all night?" said Juliana, not without a look of disgust, for she now perceived that he was half-tipsy.

"Not I: and so I was just going to lie down and have a three hours' nap—then get up again as fresh as a lark, and off to Emily——Oh! I mean——But no matter:"—and seeing that he had committed himself, he burst out laughing.

"And pray who is Emily?" asked Juliana.

"Well, come, I will tell you, as you are older than me and quite a woman now, and therefore must know that such things are done."

"I suppose you mean that you have a mistress?" said Juliana.

"That's exactly what it is. Such a sweet pretty creature! I am sure you would like to see her."

"How can you say so?" exclaimed Juliana, affecting indignation. "And Florina—what would she think?"

"Oh! bother, she needn't know it. But I can tell you that it was quite a series of romantic adventures that threw Emily in my way," continued Edmund, whom liquor had made boastful and garrulous. "Now do listen, Julie—it is such fun. The fact is, I was after Angela Vivaldi——you know——the celebrated *danseuse*; and I was led to believe she lived in a sweet little villa up beyond Holloway—the Seven Sisters' Road, they call the place. I dare say you know nothing about it: but it's a beautiful part of the suburbs. Well, pursuing my inquiries there, I fell in with such a strange woman—you never saw the like. I will just tell you what sort of a creature she is. She isn't so tall as you are—what would be called of a middle height for a woman: her hair was once black, but now turning grey. You never saw such masculine features in your life—and such eyes, dark in colour but bright as burning coals. Her great thick brows meet above her nose. She looks just like a man in disguise. Then, to complete this picture, fancy to yourself an old dingy coloured cloak and a dirty white cap on her head——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Juliana, as a sudden thought flashed across her brain: for the picture of this woman exactly answered the description which Frank Paton had given her of the one who had called at Saxondale House.

"Why do you cry out like that?" asked Edmund, looking at his sister with surprise "Have I frightened you with the portrait? I shall astonish you now with what I'm going to tell you. I was fool enough to employ this harridan to be a go-between for me and the supposed Angela—I say *supposed*, because it wasn't Angela who lived at the villa after all—but beautiful Emily Archer, whose dramatic name is Mademoiselle D' Alembert."

"Well, but what about this woman?" asked Juliana. "You have interested me in her—I fancy you found her capable of any treachery or mischief by your description——"

"Treachery!" echoed Edmund. "I don't know what the deuce it was; but in the middle of the night—for I went to sleep at her cottage—she suddenly came and awoke me and in a strange state of excitement bundled me out of the place. I really did think I saw a dagger in her hand: but it might have been fancy. Well, after that, I fell in with seven mounted highwaymen, led by a woman disguised as a man——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Juliana. "Go on."

"I have not the slightest doubt, she was the one that stopped Marlow and Malton," continued Edmund: "for she called herself Captain Chandos to me——"

"The female highway man indeed!" observed Juliana, who experienced a sad sickening at the heart, as she remembered that this was the sister of her much-loved Francis Paton.

"Yes; but if she had been alone, she wouldn't have succeeded so well, I can tell you," exclaimed Lord Saxondale. But "with five ruffians to back her——"

"I thought you said seven," remarked Juliana.

"Ah! five or seven, they were quite enough to overpower me in spite of the desperate resistance I made. I think I must have nearly done for one of them, and seriously injured another. You don't know how I fought——"

"But that strange woman," said Juliana—"where did you tell me she lived? Do you know, my dear Edmund, I am very much interested in these adventures of your's: so you must tell me all the details. In the Seven Sister's Road, you say?"

"Just in that neighbourhood. The harridan's cottage is situated in a field upon the left as you go up—not far from *Hornsey Wood Tavern*. It's a lonely and queer place. But why do you ask so many questions? Are you anxious to visit the scene of my adventures?"

"Heaven forbid! But you had better go up-stairs now and lie down: you look very much in want of rest. I dare say we shall have an opportunity presently of renewing our chat."

"Well, I do feel uncommon seedy," rejoined Edmund, with another terrific yawn: "so I will take your advice."

Thus speaking he quitted the dining-room where this colloquy had taken place: but Juliana remained there for a few minutes to reflect upon all she had just heard. She was determined to see this woman of whom she and her brother had been speaking. She had two reasons for resolving upon this course: first, that she might endeavour to glean the cause of the mysterious connexion between her mother and that female—and secondly, that she might make the woman in a certain way serve her design of giving freedom to Constance. Her first thought was to set off at once and find the woman without delay: but a second thought showed her the necessity of waiting till she had ascertained the precise hour when the travelling carriage was to be at the front-door on the morrow. Moreover, even if she were at once acquainted with this fact, she still saw the prudence of delay, because if she went so soon, the woman might take it into her head to call upon Lady Saxondale immediately afterwards, instead of waiting till the hour when Juliana meant to tell her to be at the house—and if she did thus call prematurely, the young lady's scheme might be defeated. Therefore, having well reflected upon the matter, Juliana resolved to postpone until the evening her contemplated visit.

We need not dwell upon any farther details in respect to the vigilant guardianship exercised by Lady Saxondale over Constance throughout this day. Suffice it to observe that never did military sentinel more jealously or closely watch a prisoner than this patrician lady did her younger daugher. The only consolation experienced by poor Constance, was derived from the circumstance that Juliana contrived, unseen by her mother, to make another significant sign indicative of hope. Constance therefore saw that her sister either suspected, or had by some means, ascertained the precise cause and nature of this vigilance which their mother was exercising over her, and that she was secretly working in her behalf. But in what Juliana's hope consisted—how she was working—or to what issue the whole affair was by her intervention to be brought, the young lady could not possibly conjecture.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening—after coffee had been partaken of in the drawing-room—that Juliana retired to her chamber to hold another consultation with herself what course she was to pursue. She had not as yet succeeded in ascertaining at what hour the travelling carriage was ordered for the morrow. Her mother had said nothing upon the subject—and she was too proud to ask the question; but without obtaining this particular information, she did not see how it was possible to render the woman whom she meant to visit, useful in forwarding her designs. While she was pondering in this embarrassment, her chamber door opened, and Mary-Anne made her appearance.

"I have some news, Miss," said the abigail. "Her ladyship has this moment issued orders for the carriage to be ready at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"This is just the information I required," exclaimed Juliana joyously. "Now, Mary-Anne, you must proceed at once to the Marquis of Villebelle, and tell him to be in the immediate neighbourhood with a carriage, post-chaise, or vehicle of some sort by at least a quarter to nine in the morning. Arrange with him where he will be thus waiting with the conveyance. The rest may be left to me. And, Mary-Anne," exclaimed Miss Farefield, as the maid was about to quit the chamber, "you must procure for me by some means or another the key of the side-gate, as I shall have to go out to-night."

"You, Miss?" cried Mary-Anne.

"Yes: but I cannot enter into explanations now. You shall know everything hereafter. I have all my plans well settled and arranged in my mind. Of course you will accompany my sister to-morrow, should she succeed in escaping from her ladyship and joining the Marquis of Villebelle. And now lose no time —but hasten to his lordship's lodgings."

Mary-Anne accordingly departed to execute this commission; and Juliana descended once more to the drawing-room, where her mother and sister were still seated—the one a vigilant sentinel, the other a closely-guarded prisoner. Edmund,—who instead of his three hours' nap, had been sleeping the whole day in order to shake off the effects of the previous night's debauch, —now made his appearance: and strolling with the half-careless half-languid air of a dissipated rake into the room, with his hat and gloves on, ready to sally forth again, he said, "Well, mother, so I understand you are all going into the country to-morrow?"

"Such is my intention," was Lady Saxondale's cold reply.

"Well, I wish you luck. As for me, I would see the precious old castle burnt before I would go and bury myself in it."

"No one asked for your company, sir," replied Lady Saxondale; "and therefore perhaps you will spare your comments. By the bye, I may as well inform you that if you take that list of which you recently spoke, to Marlow and Malton, they will attend to it. You understand me?"

"To be sure, I shan't forget to do so. But about the allowance?"

"Every arrangement I made with you will be duly carried out by the solicitors."

"All right," exclaimed Lord Saxondale. "And now bye-bye. I wish you all a pleasant journey."

Thus speaking, he waved his hand in a half-patronizing half-familiar fashion, and without offering to embrace either his mother or his sisters, lounged out of the room, to the great relief of Lady Saxondale, who was heartily glad to get rid of him.

"Did I understand my brother correctly?" asked Juliana, after a pause, and addressing herself to her mother with frigid voice and look, "that it is your purpose to proceed into into Lincolnshire to-morrow?"

"Is this the first you have heard of it?" asked Lady Saxondale, looking steadily at the elder daughter.

"The first. I do not remember that you had condescended to give me any information upon the subject; and as for poor Constance, she seems to be overwhelmed by some melancholy which I cannot understand, but which at all events has the effect of placing a seal upon her lips."

"It is my intention to leave London to-morrow," said Lady Saxondale.

"Perhaps, then, you will have the goodness to inform me at what hour you purpose to leave," continued Juliana, as if previously altogether ignorant on the subject, "so that I may make whatsoever preparations are necessary."

"I have not as yet decided upon the hour," returned Lady Saxondale. resolved to keep Constance as much in the dark as possible with respect to her arrangements. so that the abruptness and the early hour of departure might take her by surprise, leaving no opportunity for escape;—and though for a moment she had fancied that Juliana might have heard something through the servants, she was now well satisfied to the contrary. Thus the elder daughter's duplicity deceived the astute and keen-sighted mother.

"If you are uncertain as to the hour of departure," said Miss Farefield, "I had better commence my preparations to-night,"

Lady Saxondale gave no answer, but affected to return to the book which lay open on the table before her. Juliana made another quick sign of intelligence, indicative of hope, to Constance; and bidding her good night—but without taking any farther notice of her mother—left the room. Ascending to her own chamber she whiled away half-an-hour in consulting a map of London, and in preparations for departure, the latter being made in case the journey should really take place, with or without Constance. At the expiration of that half-hour, Mary-Anne re-appeared.

"Everything is arranged with his lordship," she said, alluding to the Marquis of Villebelle. "He will have a carriage in waiting round the corner of the next street."

"Good," said Juliana. "And now for the key of the side-door?"

"Here it is," replied Mary-Anne. "Have you any farther commands, Miss?"

"No: none at present. Does the Marquis seem in good spirits?"

"He is full of hope, Miss, in consequence of the assurance which I have given him that you are doing your utmost in behalf of Miss Constance."

"And we will succeed, too, Mary-Anne!" exclaimed Juliana in a tone of confidence: "I am certain we shall succeed. You had however better not remain here any longer now; but bring me word when my mother and sister and the household have retired."

Mary-Anne accordingly left the young lady's chamber; and another hour passed. It was now eleven o'clock; and the faithful abigail returned with the intimation that the inmates of the mansion had sought their respective chambers. Juliana was in readiness for her expedition. She had already put on a common straw garden-bonnet—the plainest dress she had in her wardrobe—and also the most unassuming shawl that she could find. Stealing down stairs, followed by Mary-Anne who carried the light, she passed out of the rear of the premises—issued from the side-gate—and telling the faithful maid that she need not sit up for her, hastened away in the direction of Oxford Street. There she entered a cab, and directed the driver to take her up to the Seven Sisters' Road in the neighbourhood of Holloway.

This ride took the best portion of an hour; and it was midnight when the intrepid Juliana descended from the vehicle at the commencement of the Seven Sisters' Road. She paid the man liberally beforehand as an earnest of her good faith that she would return; and bidding him wait for her. no matter how long, she hastened along the road. It was a beautiful clear night—so bright and lovely indeed that the small print of a book might have been read; and therefore all objects were visible to even a considerable distance. The map of London and its environs which the young lady had taken care to consult previous to leaving home, had sufficiently, defined to her comprehension. the whereabouts of the *Hornsey Wood Tavern*: and from what she had gleaned from her brother's lips she had little difficulty in discovering the cottage of which he had spoken. But when she turned out of the main road and began to traverse the field which it was necessary to pass through in order to reach the place of destination, she could not help feeling a sense of utter loneliness; and this being the first time in her life she had ever found herself in such a position—alone, at the midnight hour, in the open country,—it is no wonder if for a minute she experienced a vague and shuddering terror. But naturally endowed with a strong mind, she speedily recovered her fortitude, and resolutely advanced towards the cottage.

She now observed that it was indeed a wretched poverty-stricken tumble-down habitation; and as in the minds of the upper classes the loneliness and misery of a dwelling invariably associate themselves with the idea of treachery and crime, Juliana again felt that sense of shuddering terror come over her which she had already experienced. She therefore hesitated to proceed any farther with her present adventure: but the next moment conquering her fears, and blaming herself for even transiently giving way to them, she entered the little enclosure surrounded by the broken fence—advanced up to the door—and knocked with her closed hand.

For a few moments all continued silent within; and Juliana began to fear that the woman might not be at home. She knocked again: an upper window was then opened—and a harsh voice, but just sufficiently feminine to show that it was a woman's, demanded who was there.

"I wish to speak to you for a few moments," replied Juliana, "on very particular business."

"But who are you? and from whom do you come?" inquired the speaker from the window.

"Are you the same person who has been on two or three occasions to Saxondale House?" asked Juliana, though by the glimpse she caught of the countenance which was now thrust forth from the window, and which was surrounded by a great white cap, she felt assured she was speaking to the right individual.

"Yes—I am the same. Wait a moment: I will let you in."

The window was closed; and almost immediately afterwards the rays of a light glimmered forth through the dingy panes. Juliana heard the woman moving about in the room above as if hurrying on some clothing; and in two or three minutes more, steps were heard descending the stairs within. The door was now opened; and the woman appeared, holding a light in her hand. The glance which Juliana threw upon her at once cleared up any doubt which might have remained in respect to her identity. She had on the dirty white cap, and had thrown over her shoulders the dingy cloak that had been previously mentioned by Francis Paton and Edmund; and moreover her features exactly answered the description given from the same sources.

Juliana entered the hut, and was conducted into the little wretchedly-furnished room on the ground-floor. Madge Somers looked very hard at the young lady; and instantly recognizing the likeness, she said, "Why, you must be Lady Saxondale's daughter?"

"I am," replied Juliana; "and therefore you may suppose it is under no ordinary circumstances that my mother has sent me to you this night."

"For what purpose?" asked Madge, in her own terse and dogmatic style.

"Lady Saxondale wishes to see you on most particular business at nine-o'clock punctually in the morning. Can you be at Saxondale House precisely at that hour?"

"I can—and I will," answered Madge, evidently astonished at the invitation. "Is anything wrong, Miss?"

"My mother will herself explain the business," answered Juliana. "Of course it is connected with the secret subsisting between yourself and her ——"

"But am I to understand," interrupted Madge, looking very hard at Juliana, "that her ladyship has afforded you any insight into those secrets?"

"Surely your own good sense must tell you," rejoined Miss Farefield, meeting the woman's gaze with the steadiness of her own, "that my mother could scarcely have entrusted me with such a mission as this, unless she had given me the fullest explanations. I do indeed know what the secret is that enables you to hold my mother in your power," added the wily Juliana, hazarding the remark in order to draw out the woman.

And cunning though Madge herself was, yet Miss Farefield did succeed in drawing her out. She pretended to be weary and was therefore, invited to rest herself awhile; and during the best part of an hour that she tarried at the cottage, there was of course some conversation. Upon what topic, therefore, could they take, save and except concerning the mattter to which Juliana had at random alluded, but respecting which Madge Somers naturally fancied that the young lady possessed the fullest information? So well did the crafty Miss Farefield manage her portion of the discourse, that until the end of this interview she sustained in Madge's mind the impression that she had known everything previously: and when she took her leave, she departed with the full knowledge of all that she wanted to learn. She took good care to slip ten or a dozen sovereigns into Madge's hand: and the woman faithfully promised to be at Saxondale House at nine o'clock.

Of strange contexture were the thoughts of Juliana Farefield as she retraced her way across the field into the Seven Sisters' Road. She had learnt her mother's secret: but it was a secret that appalled her. If, ere she had set foot within the cottage of Madge Somers, she had lived ten thousand years and in that time had exhausted herself in conjectures as to what her mother's secret could really be, she never would have lighted upon the truth. The widest flights of fancy never could have reached that point to which accident had thus suddenly and strangely brought her. Even as she pondered upon that stupendous secret, she felt like one walking in a dream. She could scarcely believe in the astounding reality. Once or twice she actually stopped short to ask herself whether it were indeed true that she had heard what she thought she had believed herself to know. She looked around to fix her attention upon particular objects near, in order to acquire the certainty that she was really awake and to satisfy herself it was no delusive vision of the night. Then she walked on, reached the vehicle which was waiting for her at the place where she had left it.

The morning had just begun to dawn,—the bright summer morning, bringing back the presence of day to arouse a sleeping world, to bid the flowers lift their heads and open their buds, and to signal the matin hymn from the feathered choristers in trees and hedgerows. It was four o'clock when Juliana alighted from the cab in the vicinage of Saxondale House; and with her veil carefully drawn down over her countenance, so as to conceal her features from the observation of the policeman whom an amorous cook was just stealthily letting out up the area-steps of a neighbouring mansion, —Juliana sped on to the side-gate. There she let herself in by aid of the key that she had with her, and passed safely into the mansion. Then, locking the back door, and fastening the bolts so as to avert suspicion of any one having issued from the house during the night, she regained her own chamber.

Thoroughly exhausted with her adventure, she speedily sought her couch, and fell into a deep slumber: but the particulars of her interview with Madge Somers followed her in her dreams.

She did not awoke till eight o'clock, and would not perhaps have aroused herself then, had not Mary-Anne knocked at her chamber-door. Juliana hastened to give her admittance; and the lady's maid bent an inquiring look upon her young mistress. But Miss Farefield had not the slightest intention of giving the abigail any account of her nocturnal expedition:— she therefore spoke hurriedly and evasively—promised to tell her everything at a more fitting opportunity — and purposely gave her some commissions to execute which would occupy the next half-hour and thus prevent farther conversation. Mary-Anne did not perceive that she was treated with any deficiency of confidence, but expressed her delight at the assurance which Juliana vaguely gave her that measures were taken to ensure the emancipation of Constance from the close thraldom in which she was now held.

At half-past eight another lady's-maid — Lucilla by name — knocked at Juliana's door: and upon being desired to enter, she said, "If you please Miss, her ladyship purposes to leave at nine o'clock punctually, and hopes that you are now ready for breakfast, and that your things are all packed up."

"Here is the box I intend to take with me," said Juliana. You can send up one of the footmen to fetch it down and cord it.

Miss Farefield then descended to the breakfast-parlour, where she found her mother and sister already seated at table. Lady Saxondale appeared inclined to unbend in some slight degree towards her elder daughter—probably deeming it convenient that they should be upon less chilling terms with each other, especially as they had a long journey before them, during which the frigidity of silence would prove irksome enough. Juliana herself had no objection to affect an inclination to meet her mother half way towards reconcilement, the better to lull her into the completest security and confidence as to the success of her own plan, so that the counter-plot which was arranged to happen should strike her ladyship with a suddenness that would leave her paralyzed and helpless, thereby ensuring the escape of Constance.

"You look pale, Juliana," said Lady Saxondale with an appearance of concern.

"I have not slept well, mother, and have a violent headache."

"The travelling will do you good."

"I hope so," rejoined Miss Farefield.

They talked on in this strain for a little longer; and at ten minutes to nine Lady Saxondale said, "We had now better put on our things; for the travelling-carriage will be almost immediately at the door. We have post-horses, of course. Two of the footmen will ride on the box: Mary-Anne and Lucilla will go in the rumble behind."

Juliana once more ascended to her chamber, while Constance accompanied Lady Saxondale to the latter's suite of apartments. But we should observe that the elder sister had again found an opportunity to make a sign indicative of hope to Constance. Still was this young lady a prey to the deepest suspense as to the meaning of all these signals of intelligence, but still, likewise, did she derive some consolation therefrom, for she stood so deeply in need of solace!

The travelling-carriage, with four-horses and two postilions, drove up to the front of Saxondale House. The boxes were all corded in the hall, ready to be stowed away upon the roof of the vehicle, where they were now speedily packed in the usual manner. The two footmen who were to accompany the equipage, were in attendance; as were also Mary-Anne and Lucilla. Lady Saxondale and her two daughters were now alone waited for. The clocks were striking nine as they descended the great marble staircase, dressed for travelling. Constance held her mother's arm—the last precaution which her ladyship fancied that it would be necessary to take in order to ensure the departure of her younger daughter from London and guard against the possibility of flight. Juliana followed a few paces behind. They crossed the hall—they issued forth from the mansion—one of the footmen held open the carriage door, the steps of which were down. A glow of triumph thrilled through the entire form of Lady Saxondale as she felt confident that all her plans had now reached the acme of success; but a similar glow was experienced by Juliana Farefield, as she caught sight of Madge Somers in her old cloak, her dirty white cap, and with her forbidding looks of masculine harshness, rapidly approaching.

"You get in first, Constance," said Lady Saxondale: but at that instant she also caught sight of Madge Somers, and a ghastly paleness seized upon her as she staggered a pace or two back: then utterly losing her presence of mind, she advanced to meet the woman, entirely forgetting everything that regarded Constance.

"Fly, my dear sister!" were the quickly whispered words that Juliana now all in a moment breathed in the ears of Constance. "Round the first turning to the left—and you are saved!"

Constance threw one look of affectionate gratitude upon her sister, and sped away in the direction indicated,—the faithful Mary-Anne following close upon her heels. The footman—Lucilla—the servants who were loitering on the threshold to behold the departure—even the very postilions themselves, were struck with amazement at this precipitate flight of the young lady and her maid; and those who happened to turn their eyes the next moment upon Juliana, saw that her features were radiant with an expression of satisfaction and triumph.

All that we have just related was the work of a few moments, during which Lady Saxondale had encountered Madge Somers and quickly demanded, "Why do you seek me now?"

"By your own commands," replied the woman, somewhat startled by this abrupt and most unexpected question.

"My commands?" echoed her ladyship. "What mean you?"—and a thousand wild terrific apprehensions flitted in an instant through her brain with agonizing poignancy.

"Did you not send one of your daughters to me last night——"

A shriek rose up to Lady Saxondale's lips—but she repressed it ere uttered; and feeling like one on whom frenzy was fastening, she quickly turned her head. Juliana was standing alone by the carriage-door. Lady Saxondale rushed up to the vehicle and looked in; but no Constance was there. That some hideous treachery had been practised, she felt convinced; and her looks instantaneously flashed upon Juliana. Then, in her elder daughter's countenance did the wretched, almost maddened Lady Saxondale read the expression of malignant triumph which showed that the treachery was her's and that it had fully succeeded!

For an instant the unhappy lady stood in utter bewilderment, not knowing how to act; but with a sudden effort she regained some of her lost composure, and darting a terrible look upon Juliana, made an impatient gesture for Madge Somers to follow her up the steps into the house. The next moment her ladyship and the woman traversed the hall, entered the dining-room, and thus disappeared from the view of Juliana and the amazed beholders of this scene which was so extraordinary and so incomprehensible to them.

Miss Farefield herself, not choosing to remain standing in the street as a target for the scrutinising looks of the servants and postilions,—and as a matter of course not having a single word of explanation to give, even if she would have condescended to any,—slowly ascended into the hall; and observing to one of the lacqueys, "If her ladyship should want me, I am here,"—passed at once into the breakfast parlour.

The servants all exchanged glances of bewilderment. Every one appeared to ask the rest what on earth all this meant: but none could even venture so much as a conjecture to the solution of the mystery. Certain it was that Miss Constance had fled precipitately, with Mary-Anne closely following: certain also was it that Lady Saxondale had been strangely agitated on beholding that queer-looking woman with whom she had now shut herself up in the dining-room;—and certain likewise was it that Miss Juliana had experienced some good reason for triumphant satisfaction. Yes—all these things were certain enough: but what was the explanation of them? One part of the drama looked uncommonly like an elopement: the rest of it defied all conjecture.

Juliana had not been quite ten minutes in the breakfast-parlour, when the door opened and her mother appeared upon the threshold. She was ghastly pale—a ghastliness enhanced by the brunette tint of her complexion, the delicate duskiness of which now seemed to have changed into the sallowness of death. Her lips were blanched—her eyes were fixed, but shot forth strange fires. She was evidently a prey to emotions agitating in her bosom with all the pent-up fury of the boiling lava imprisoned within the volcano that still outwardly seems to sleep.

"I am ready," she said in a cold but deep voice.

Juliana started for an instant as this intimation that the journey was to be pursued met her ears: for she feared lest Constance had been brought back. But immediately recovering herself she rose from her seat and followed her mother from the room. Lady Saxondale, who had now drawn down her veil to conceal from the domestics the horrible feelings which she knew to be reflected on her countenance, passed steadily on to the carriage—entered it—and took her seat. Juliana followed; and a glance at the interior of the vehicle quieted her apprehensions in a moment, showing her that Constance was not there. It was consequently with a renewed sensation of joyousness that she likewise entered the vehicle.

"Are we to wait, my lady?" asked the footman, still holding the carriage door open; and she spoke hesitatingly, while perplexity and bewilderment were depicted in his features.

"No: we will proceed at once," was Lady Saxondale's reply but it struck Juliana that it was given in the bewilderment of one who was in a state between stupor and despair.

The steps were put up—the door was closed—the footman leapt to the box—and the equipage dashed away from the door of Saxondale House.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE TETE-A-TETE IN THE TRAVELLING-CARRIAGE.

The carriage pursued its way at a rapid rate through the streets of the metropolis: the suburbs were reached and passed—and the open country was gained. Nearly an hour had elapsed since the vehicle quitted Park Lane; and all this while not a single word was spoken inside.

Lady Saxondale had thrown herself back in the corner of the carriage, and had remained perfectly motionless from the commencement of the journey : her veil was still over her countenance, so that Juliana was totally unable to obtain the slightest indication as to her mother's feelings or what was now passing in her mind. The young lady herself sat absorbed in thought, revolving all she had heard during the past night and all that had happened this morning : she wondered where her sister and the Marquis of Villebelle were at the moment—and with a subdued sigh she thought of Francis Paton.

Presently Lady Saxondale slowly raised herself from that reclining posture, and as slowly lifted her veil. Juliana mechanically turned her eyes upon her mother, and gave a sudden start—indeed, could scarcely repress a scream—on beholding the fiendish expression with which that mother was regarding her. Grandly handsome as Lady Saxondale naturally was, she seemed at that moment absolutely hideous: her features were all convulsed with a satanic rage—her set teeth gleamed between her ashy lips which contortion kept apart—her nobly pencilled brows were corrugated—her lofty forehead was contracted into wrinkles—while her eyes glared, or even glowered in a manner horrible to contemplate.

"Ah! you are frightened detestable girl!" she said in a thick husky voice: then as her countenance gradually assumed a more natural appearance, still however remaining ghastly pale, and with sinister fires gleaming in the eyes she added, "Juliana, what do you think of yourself after all that you have done?"

"If you allude to the affair Constance," responded the elder daughter, now having recovered the most perfect self-possession, "I rejoice and I triumph"

"Perish Constance!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, vehemently. "I cast her off—I abandon her for ever! I discard her : she is no longer a daughter of mine! Let her go to become the paramour of a married man : let her drag out her life in infamy, shame, and dishonour! When the French adventurer is tired of her, he will thrust her off. She will perhaps come back to me, full of contrition and remorse: I will spurn her. Then she will go and fling herself into the arms of some new lover, and he in turn will cast her away from him when satiated. Perhaps she will come back again to me: I will spurn her with my foot as before. Then she will continue in the ways of profligacy, passing from lover to lover, but each time descending lower and lower, in the social scale—till at length she will take her infamy with her into the streets. And there," added Lady Saxondale, with accents of bitter irony, but which were almost immediately succeeded by a strange and unnatural laugh resembling an hysterical shriek—" she will drag herself on through all pollutions—there the daughter of patrician parents will suffer all insults and all ignominies, till at length her wretched career will close in a ditch or a lazar-house!"

"I have listened to this tirade of your's mother, with unspeakable horror and the depeest disgust," said Juliana, at first somewhat frightened by the terrible vehemence with which Lady Saxondale spoke but afterwards showing an air of loathing and abhorrence. "Whatever Constance may have this day done, it was your tyrrany that drove her to it ; and as for the picture you have drawn, it is quite clear that in your malignant wickedness you depict what you desire should happen."

"You are adopting proud and haughty language towards me," said Lady Saxondale, now bending upon Juliana looks as ferocious as those of a tigress. "Infamous girl! what diabolical treachery did you practise during the past night!"

"And what a fearful secret did I learn mother," retorted Miss Farefield.

"Ah! a secret—yes! I know that you discovered it : I know that by means of the most detestable artifice you wormed it out of that woman who, cunning as she generally is, was nevertheless thrown off her guard by your matchless duplicity. "Well, that secret—go and proclaim it if you like! Are you disposed to do so? On my soul, it has cost me so much to keep it, that it would now take but little to induce me to proclaim it to the world at once. Therefore, Juliana, do not think that by the knowledge of this secret you have got me in your power, so that I shall henceforth cringe to your tyranny. If you imagine this, you are very much mistaken.

Lady Saxondale had spoken with extreme volubility, and in such a state of frenzied excitement that her daughter had never seen her exhibit before. She would perhaps have gone on longer: but exhausted and breathless, she sank back in the corner of the carriage.

"It is no use, mother, for you to affect an utter recklessness with regard to this secret," said Juliana, in a voice that was spiteful in its very coldness. "You know perfectly well that all you have just been saying is not only false, but purely nonsensical, As long as you cling to life, will you cling to that secret; but even if you had made up your mind to suicide, you would not tell that secret to a living soul ere you accomplished the work of self-destruction. You might leave the secret, or rather its elucidation, written upon paper so as to exercise a posthumous revenge against one whom you hate most cordially: but you would not dare look the world in the face and explain all the past."

"You know not what I shall dare—you know not what I shall be goaded to!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, quivering all over with a terrible rage, which appeared as if it must vent itself by doing her daughter a mischief—for it was the rage of the tiger cat. "Why are you here?" she suddenly explained, after a few moments' pause: "why did you not go away with your sister? or why do you not run after your Francis Paton? Ah! have I called a blush up to those proud cheeks of your's? What are you? the mistress of a menial hind! You have had a lacquey for your paramour——faugh!"

"Go on, mother," said Juliana, the carnation hue suddenly flitting from her cheeks and leaving them colourless; but still she battled successfully against the rage which Lady Saxondale's words had excited her within her. "Go on, mother: you will not provoke me to come to actual blows with you; for *that* I persume to be your object now. It would be a pretty thing for the postilions and servants to learn that the brilliant Lady Saxondale and her daughter fought like two cats in their travelling carriage?"

"Juliana, how is all this to end?" exclaimed the miserable woman; and with an involuntary motion she appeared to wring her hands. My God! is it possible that all this has happened? Nothing but troubles have come upon me lately; and when I told you just now that I cared not if the world knew everything, I spoke my thoughts. But Ah! remember—you then talked of suicide, and in connexion with myself. If you only knew how near I am resolving at this moment upon that catastrophe, you would say naught to goad me on to it. But again I ask, how is all this to end? You and I, Juliana, cannot live together upon these terms."

"It was not I who offered to accompany you down into Lincolnshire," was the young lady's freezing reply. "By the mere fact of your coming, you knew that I was bound to accompany you. Besides, after your interview with that woman just now, you came and told me you were ready. Did not this mean that you desired me to follow you?"

"I was half mad at the time—I knew not what I was doing," answered Lady Saxondale. "The carriage was at the door—flight from home seemed in itself a relief—it appeared as if one could flee away from thought! Besides, it would not do to stultify oneself before all the domestics by countermanding the carriage. And yet, good heavens! what must they have thought to see Constance disappear thus suddenly, and me compelled to conduct that vile harridan into the house—then closet myself with her—Oh! it is enough to drive one to frenzy! But after all, I was wrong not to institute a chase after constance. We will return—we will retrace our way!"—and Lady Saxondale was about to thrust her head forth to command the postilions to stop, when Juliana pulled her back.

"If you think of returning to London in the hope of discovering Constance," she said quickly, "you may save yourself the trouble. The arrangements were so admirably made that all pursuit and search would be useless."

"And these arrangements were made by you!" cried Lady Saxondale, fiercely. "Consummate hypocrite that you are, Juliana—I hate you! I hate you!"

"You call me hypocrite—do you? Well, it is by no means unusual or unnatural for daughters to take after their mothers," retorted Juliana.

"Oh! this becomes intolerable!" said Lady Saxondale, now uttterly unable to restrain a violent outburst of agonised feelings: and she not only wrung her hands, but gave way to her tears.

Yes—that proud, haughty, high-spirited woman wept bitterly; and convulsive sobs rent her bosom. She felt herself subdued—crushed—overwhelmed. Her soul was filled with hideous passions, chiefly with a horrible spite against the daughter by her side—but a spite which she knew not how to vent. She could have turned round and dragged her nails down Juliana's face—she would have gloried in spoiling that grand beauty which was a reflection of her own—she could have torn out her daughter's eyes—have dashed out her teeth—have dug her nails deep into Juliana's flesh! How she restrained herself she scarcely knew; and it was perhaps because she felt that her rage was thus so impotent that she gave vent to her spite in tears; and sobs, and in the wringing of her hands. But this outburst of emotion calmed the unnatural excitement to which she had been worked up: and she recovered some degree of composure. Drawing down her veil again, she relapsed into silence.

It is not our purpose to dwell at any unnecessary length upon the journey into Lincolnshire—a journey which lasted until the evening. We must however observe that little was the conversation which ensued for the rest of the way between the mother and daughter. Lady Saxondale occasionally broke forth into fresh reporoaches, to which Juliana was not slow in giving equally cutting retorts: until at length the mother, wearied of the horrible excitement attendant upon these fierce bickerings, shut herself up in a sullen reserve. In this way the last three hours of the journey were passed; and as the sun was setting, the towers and battlemented buildings of Saxondale Castle gradually developed themselves to the view of the travellers.

The carriage dashed up to the front entrance of the castle, where the servants were assembled to receive their mistress and her daughters. A letter which Lady Saxondale had written on the previous day, made them aware of her intended visit: for we should observe that there was a full complement of domestics always kept up at Saxondale Castle. The moment the equipage stopped, the servants perceived that her ladyship was accompanied by her elder daughter only; and when, after their mistress and Juliana had passed into the hall, attended by the senior domestics and Lucilla, those who remained outside learnt from the footmen who came with the carriage under what mysterious circumstances Miss Constance Farefield had suddenly disappeared with Mary-Anne, they were as much astonished as the household in Park Lane had been.

Two years had elapsed since Lady Saxondale had last visited the castle. Her visits were neither frequent in themselves, nor very lengthy when they were paid—it being generally believed that her ladyship had no particular affection for her country-seat in Lincolnshire. During that interval of two years no change had taken place in the ancient edifice: nor indeed during the far longer interval of nineteen years since first we introduced our reader to that castellated mansion, had time effected much visible alteration. There it was still, that ancient castle—frowning in gloomy grandeur above the river and over the landscape through which the Trent winds its way!—there it was, that assemblage of buildings, constituting in their vastness one of the grandest and most remarkable mansions belonging to the British Aristocracy!

Lady Saxondale and Juliana ascended to their respective bed-rooms, each attended by a maid; and having achieved some alterations in their toilet after their long, dusty, and fatiguing journey, they descended to the dining-room, where a late dinner—or rather supper, as it might be called in strict reference to the hour—was served up. But neither felt much inclination for the dainties spread before them; and they soon proceeded to the drawing-room, to take the more welcome refreshment of tea or coffee.

What a host of recollections now swept back to the mind of Lady Saxondale! It was to this room, nineteen years back, that Ralph Farefield had followed her from the chamber of the dead old Lord Saxondale, to satisfy himself that the child whose restoration had been announced to him, was really there. As the widow of that old lord now cast her eyes around, every incident of that scene appeared to spring up to her view with as vivid a reality as when it took place at the time. There was the spot where Mabel was sitting at the moment with the child in her arms: there was also the spot where her ladyship's father, the Rev. Mr. Clifton, had said in the fervour of his grateful piety, "God in his mercy be thanked for the dear babe's restoration!"—there too was the window-recess where she and Ralph had conversed together when she gave him that appointment in the chapel—an appointment which he kept, but whence he never departed alive! And where now were all these of whom she was thus thinking? Ralph Farefield had perished miserably and mysteriously: and the lady had unexpectedly and startlingly found herself not long back confronted with his embalmed corpse in the museum at Dr. Ferney's dwelling. Years had elapsed since her father the Rev. Mr. Clifton had gone down into the tomb; and many a sun had since shone upon the church and many a winter's wind had howled around the walls of that same sacred edifice in the vaults of which his remains were interred. And Mabel—she likewise was no more: but a few days only had elapsed since she departed from this life, as detailed in a previous chapter. But the child which nineteen years back that same Mabel had held in her arms in this same drawing-room—for whose restoration Mr. Clifton had poured forth his gratitude—and whose presence there had so cruelly damped all the magnificent hopes and aspirations of Ralph Farefield,—that child had grown up to become a bitter curse to Lady Saxondale—the object of her hatred—and as she herself had so bitterly expressed it, "a viper that she had cherished to sting her!"

As her ladyship sat in this drawing-room with Juliana on the first evening of their return to the castle, her thoughts were assuredly of no agreeable complexion. All the memories with which this very room was associated, were fraught with unspeakable mournfulness for her. A deep gloom succeeding the terrific excitement of all the earlier part of the day, had fallen upon her spirits; and she felt a presentiment of approaching evil. She regretted having come to Saxondale Castle: the silence that prevailed throughout the edifice, appeared to strike her with a tomb-like awfulness. In London she was in the midst of life and gaiety. The mansion in Park Lane being smaller, there were the constant sounds of persons moving about the house: but here, in this vast baronial edifice, nothing was heard. In the metropolis, splendid equipages were constantly dashing by the mansion: here naught went by except the silent river pursuing its steady, noiseless, and inanimate way. In London, Lady Saxondale might have plunged into all imaginable gaieties for the purpose of drowning thought: here she must reckon upon passing hours and hours alone, or else in the companionship of a daughter whom she detested almost as much as she hated Edmund himself. Altogether, Lady Saxondale experienced a deep regret that she should have quitted the metropolis and come down into Lincolnshire.

Juliana sat apparently half-dozing in her chair, but in reality watching her mother's countenance. She herself experienced a gloomy despondency which she could not shake off; and she also regretted having left London. There she might have heard of Constance: there she might have carried out her design of ensnaring some old lord in his dotage, or some antiquated commoner, into the matrimonial noose, and thus be enabled to indulge in her licentious passion for Francis Paton. But here, in the country, there was by no means the same chance of accomplishing her aims: and as for Francis, she would lose sight of him altogether, and on her return to London know not how to fall upon any clue to his discovery. Thus was it that both mother and daughter felt the gloom of Saxondale Castle strike with a chill to their souls and plunge their spirits into the deepest despondency.

The clock in the tower over the entrance proclaimed the hour of ten, when her ladyship starting from her reverie, pulled the bell somewhat violently. A footman answered the summons; and she desired him to order her maid to attend with chamber-candles. Shortly afterwards Lucilla made her appearance; and as Lady Saxondale rose to issue from the room, she was struck by observing that the young woman's countenance looked pale and agitated. She gazed again: and although Lucilla endeavoured to compose her features, yet Lady Saxondale's keen penetrating eyes could not be deceived by this attempt on the abigail's part to veil unpleasant feelings.

"Is anything the matter?" demanded Lady Saxondale.

"The matter? Oh, no, my lady," replied Lucilla, now blushing and looking very much confused.

"Yes, but I can see there is," cried her ladyship. "Tell me, Lucilla—you need not be afraid to speak—what is the matter? I see that there is something upon your mind."

"Your ladyship would perhaps be angry" said the young woman still hesitating.

"I have already told you not to be afraid to speak frankly. What is the matter?"

"Only, my lady, I was rather frightened by what I had heard down in the servants' hall——"

"And what is that? Do for heaven's sake make use of your tongue, and let us hear of what nature the gossip is that has so alarmed you."

"Please, my lady, the servants say that last night there was a ghost seen in the western side of the castle."

The reader will recollect that the whole of this portion of the edifice to which Lucilla had just alluded, as well as the extremity that may be termed the back or northern part of the building, had long been disused, but not shut up—for the rooms which were in those quarters had for years and years past been attended to with the greatest care and shown as curiosities to all guests visiting the castle. These rooms were all furnished in the style of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: the walls were hung with tapestry, which however was for the most part torn and tattered; and altogether the aspect of those apartments was that of the interior of the ancient mansions which romancists love to describe, and which superstition deems most congenial to the presence of spirits from the other world. Nor must it be forgotten that the chapel was on the western side, overlooking the River Trent,—that same chapel where Lady Saxondale's appointment was kept by Ralph Farefield, but from which he never went forth alive!

At that announcement relative to the ghost which Lucilla had just made, Lady Saxondale gave a contemptuous smile—as did also Juliana. The former was turning away to proceed to her chamber, when the latter said, "Perhaps you will tell us Lucilla, something more about this apparition?"

The maid hesitated, seeing that Lady Saxondale was moving away: but her ladyship suddenly stopped, and again turning round, said, "Yes—give us the particulars: for it is possible that there may be ghosts with a predatory intent secreted in the castle; and if so, it will be as well to have a thorough examination of the place ere we retire to rest."

"From what I have been told, my lady," answered Lucilla, "it appears that some of the servants went into the tapestry-rooms yesterday to dust them and open the windows. Robert,"—alluding to one of the footmen,—"went into the chapel to open the windows there: and he entered the cloister of tombs. At that moment he thought he heard a door shut; and going back into the chapel, he saw that the door of the vestiary, which he had noticed to be open a few minutes before, was now closed. For the moment he was rather startled: but he opened it, and looked in. No one was there; and he accordingly concluded that it must have been the draught from the entrance of the chapel that had made the door shut. He therefore thought no more of the matter. In the evening he and two or three others of the servants went back to shut the windows again. They had lights with them: for it was then dusk. Having closed the windows in the rooms and the corridor, they passed into the chapel: but just at the instant they entered the place they saw a shape glide into the vestiary. They ran out into a terrible fright; but ashamed of themselves, stopped short in the passage. Then Robert mentioned the circumstance about the door shutting in the morning. They all resolved to go and explore the vestiary together. They did so, but saw nothing. They even opened the door which leads down into the vaults: but I do not think they descended the steps. However, the servants are all full of the idea that a ghost was really seen, and I hope your ladyship will not be angry with me for having felt a little frightened after what I heard—nor yet you, Miss——"

"Angry with you!" ejaculated Juliana: "who can be angry with you, for having told what you heard and what you were desired to tell?"

"It is very ridiculous," said Lady Saxondale, but with a certain air of constraint, and also in a low and altered voice;—"very ridiculous indeed for the domestics to give way to such foolish alarms. No doubt the wind caused the door to shut in the morning, and a shadow frightened the silly creatures in the evening. It would be giving too much importance to the matter to institute any additional search. I shall now retire. Good night, Juliana."

"Good night, mother," responded the young lady: and rising from her seat, she rang the bell for another maid to attend upon herself,

It must not be thought that this interchange of the usual valedictions between the mother and daughter proved that a reconciliation had taken place. They were still as much at enmity as ever: they had not exchanged ten words since they alighted at the castle—and it was only for the sake of appearances that they had thus wished each other good night in the presence of Lucilla.

On proceeding to her apartment, attended by the maid, Lady Saxondale was struck by its gloomy appearance. Not but that it was splendidly furnished, and belonging to what was termed the inhabited portion of the castle, was completely modernized in all its appointments: yet still it was very different from the elegant and cheerful bed-chamber which she was wont to occupy at Saxondale House in London. The deep doorway — the arched windows — the immense chimney-piece — the huge-cornices, elaborately carved and inwrought with armorial bearings — struck her in strong contrast with the light, airy, and pleasing architectural arrangements of the mansion in the metropolis. Besides, this apartment was so spacious that although wax-candles burnt upon the toilet-table and a lamp on another table on the opposite side, the remote corners appeared to be enveloped in gloom. But Lady Saxondale struggled hard to throw off the oppressive feeling which sat so heavily upon her; and her pride would not let her make any comment upon her sensations in the presence of Lucilla.

When her night-toilet was completed and the maid was dismissed, Lady Saxondale did not immediately seek her couch. She could not conceal from herself that the ghost-story had made a certain impression upon her. If she had been asked whether she believed in the possibility of apparitions from the other world, she would have scornfully replied in the negative; and even if she had sat down deliberately to ask herself whether she entertained such a belief, the secret response to her own self-put query would have been precisely the same. Moreover the reader is already aware that she was a very strong-minded woman. But her spirit had been much bent by the incidents of the morning: the terrific excitement through which she had passed had left in its reactionary influence the darkest despondency hovering around her soul; and her reflections in the drawing-room had conjured up memories and associations but too well calculated to increase the depression of her mind. She was therefore peculiarly susceptible of the gloomy impressions made by ths antique appearence of the spacious apartment, notwithstanding all the embellishments of modern splendour which under other circumstances would have entirely eclipsed or absorbed that air of sombre heaviness: and in like manner was her imagination, borne down and attenuated as it was, accessible to a superstitious terror.

She did not therefore immediately retire to rest. Perhaps, in addition to all that we have jnst detailed, there were still darker and deeper fears haunting her mind, excited by the memories of the past and the associations of the present. She felt afraid to enter her couch. But at length literally ashamed of her terrors, she said aloud, "This weakness on my part is preposterous!"—and she advanced towards the bed.

But obedient to an irresistible impulse, she stooped down, raised the drapery, and looked under it. No object of alarm met her eyes; and rising up again, she once more blamed herself of her silly fears. But still she had not the courage to lie down: and almost before she was aware of it, she found herself looking into the cupboards, and with the lamp in her hand taking a close survey of the apartment. Even to the dressing-room opening thence, and to a bath-room which lay beyond, did she push her investigation: but still she discovered naught to alarm her.

"Now," she said to herself, "I will lie down:—but as she again approached the couch, she experienced a vague and deepening terror for which she could not altogether account.

Replacing the lamp upon the table, she stood hesitating in the middle of the room. She caught a glimpse of her countenance in the mirror suspended above the toilet-table, and saw that it was very pale. Her own looks frightened her, and a cold shudder swept through her entire frame. Her glossy black hair was gathered up beneath an elegant cap—a morning wrapper enveloped her superb form—her naked feet were thrust into embroidered slippers—and there she stood in the middle of the apartment, like a grand statue of classic beauty oppressed with a dumb deep consternation which she could not shake off.

"No, no,—it cannot be!" she suddenly said to herself, with the desperate effort of a naturally strong mind endeavouring to cast away the incubus of a terror to the cause of which her proper intelligence could not assent: "the spirits of the departed do *not* walk upon earth! And yet if it were so, the shade of *him* may indeed be supposed to revisit that place——"

But here her thoughts abruptly stopped short, for she dared not pursue their tenure: and then, by one of those inscrutable impulses which sometimes make their influence felt upon the denizens of this world, she experienced a shuddering desire to visit the spot to which she had just alluded and satisfy herself that there was no cause for alarm. Indeed, she began to feel that until she had done this she could not hope to shake off the vague terrors which had seized upon her—much less to pass her nights in tranquillity beneath that roof. And now all the fortitude of this naturally strong-minded woman came back to her aid; and she resolved upon obeying the secret impulse which was every moment becoming paramount above the alternatives of obedience or disobedience. It was growing irresistible!

"If his spirit may appear to any one, it will be certain to appear to *me*," she said to herself. "If so, better meet the apparition at once, than live in constant terror of beholding it draw aside the bed curtains or emerge from the obscurity of some corner in this room. But if not, then shall I indeed smile at the fears which have crept upon me—and they will revisit me no more."

These reflections, to which she could not have possibly been led in the broad daylight were natural enough at the hour of night, influence unknown in the sunshine exercise their mystic and indomitable sway. Lady Saxondale hastened to throw on some additional clothing; and taking the lamp in her hand, she issued from the room. She paused just outside the threshold to assure herself that the household had retired to rest and that all was still within the castle—and hearing no sound, she passed onward through the passages and corridors leading to the western side of the edifice. In a few minutes she reached that corridor whence the chapel opened; and here she stopped short suddenly saying to herself, "The feeling that has brought me hither argues a greater weakness than the vague terror which first gave rise to it."

She was about to retrace her way: but no—she could not. An irresistible impulse urged her on; and in a sort of desperation, she said, "Yes, I will proceed, if it be only to convince myself that I have the courage to do so!"

She accordingly opened the chapel-door; and though it was the middle of summer, the place struck chill to her flesh, lightly clad as she was. She advanced a few paces, and then paused to listen and to look around. All was still—and no object of terror met her eyes. Through the open arched entrance her looks plunged into the cloister: but the light of the lamp did not penetrate far enough to develop in shapely outline the objects it contained: they looked like things darker than the darkness which enveloped them. She glanced towards the vestiary, and a shudder passed through her frame—while her countenance, already pale, grew paler still. But it was not that she saw anything to alarm her: for she did not. The door was shut—and all was silence, and stillness, and immovability around.

She made a step forward to approach that vestiary; but with another cold shudder—a dread abhorrence for that spot—she turned aside and passed into the cloister. Now she was amidst the tombs, and in the presence of that colossal figure of black marble representing a warrior in complete armour with the vizor closed,—the stone effigy of the founder of the proud race of Saxondale! Her ladyship was not a woman to tremble before this cold inanimate form; and she remained gazing upon it as it stood there in its life-like attitude with the left hand upon the hip and the right arm extended towards the door. She even felt the proud satisfaction of proving her own courage by lingering thus in that place of tombs and in the presence of that marble man. At length she turned away; and now with a firmer step, a stronger compression of the lips, and a more daring spirit of research, she approached the vestiary. Without hesitation—without even allowing herself to pause, lest her fortitude should fail her—she at once opened the door. As the huge portal moved slowly upon its hinges, the light of the lamp which she carried in her hand threw its beams into the place: and then, with a still unflinching boldness, she crossed the threshold.

But, Ah! how was it that the lamp fell not from her hand?—for at the instant her blood all seemed to curdle in her veins—the pulsations of her heart stood still—and an appalling consternation seized spell-like upon her. A form in human shape was stretched upon the huge oaken chest wherein the silver plate of the altar and the garments of the priests were wont to be kept in the Catholic period of that chapel's existence. But only for an instant lasted the superstitious nature of her horror:—transient as any human feeling can be, it was succeeded by another though scarcely less fearful species of consternation, as she recognised in that recumbent sleeping figure the unmistakable form and features of Chiffin the Cannibal!

CHAPTER LV.

THE VESTIARY OF THE CHAPEL.

Lady Saxondale's first impulse was to fly—to raise an alarm—and to have the villain arrested: but all in a moment the light of the lamp flashing upon his eyes, awoke him—and he started up. He had slept with a loaded pistol by his side, which he instinctively clutched and presented at her ladyship, so that she still remained petrified with horror; but immediately recognizing her, he lowered the weapon, and giving vent to a subdued chuckling laugh, said in his usual growling tone, "Why, what on earth brings you here, ma'am, at this hour?"

Lady Saxondale, recovering somewhat of her presence of mind, glanced around to assure herself that the ruffian had no companions with him; and perceiving that he was alone, she grew more courageous—so that it was even with a return of her accustomed haughtiness of look and manner that she said, "Rather should I ask how dare *you* set foot within these walls?"

"For want of a better home at the present," replied Chiffin, as coolly as if there were not the slightest cause for alarm on his own account: and indeed such was his conviction.

"But what is to prevent me from summoning my domestics and handing you over to the grasp of justice?" demanded Lady Saxondale, wishing to ascertain the precise grounds of the man's self-sufficiency: for she could not help seeing that he considered her to be a certain extent in his power.

"What should prevent you?" he said: "why, several things, to be sure—and I dare say you ain't far off from guessing some of 'em."

"Name them," rejoined Lady Saxondale abruptly: for the terrible suspicion flashed to her mind that perhaps Madge Somers had betrayed her secret to the Cannibal, although the woman had positively sworn to her ladyship in the morning of that day, at Saxondale House, that she had treasured it closely in her own breast until it was inveigled from her by Juliana—but that to Juliana alone had she ever mentioned it.

"Name them—eh?" echoed the Cannibal, "Well, in the first place, it was rather a rum thing the way that my friend and employer Mr. Ralph Farefield——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, starting as if a viper had suddenly plunged its fangs into her leg: and then she glanced instinctively towards the door leading down the subterranean vaults.

"Oh! then you didn't know that me and Mr. Farefield was intimate?" said the Cannibal: "but such was the case. I should have thought Madge Somers would have mentioned that circumstance to your ladyship. I told her all about it one night not very long ago; and as of course I know she's been in communication with your ladyship, I thought she might have spoken on that subject."

"She never did," observed Lady Saxondale, with nervous petulance. "Do you know why she has been in communication with me?"—and she fixed her eyes earnestly upon the Cannibal.

"Why, I suppose because she saved your son's life that night up at he cottage—for what reason though I never could tell, as I shouldn't have spared him—and that's the truth."

"Yes, yes—you are right," said Lady Saxondale hastily. "That is the reason why the woman Somers asserts a claim upon my gratitude:"—and with a secret feeling of indescribable relief and satisfaction she mentally added. "He does *not* know the secret. Madge has proved faithful."

"Well, but as I was saying," resumed Chiffin, "wasn't it rather suspicious that Mr. Farefield should have met his death in so queer a way? It isn't likely he went down into that vault and drowned himself of his own accord: he wasn't the man to do it—partickler as when the old lord was dead, there was only the bantling betwixt Ralph and the title as well as the estate—and he knowed that I was ready to lend him a helping hand in the matter. But to tell your ladyship the truth, I never had any suspicion that Ralph met his death by foul means—I always thought it was an accident—till t'other night, when I took the little liberty of introducing myself to your ladyship at Saxondale House by the aid of a skeleton key and a crow-bar: for them's generally my letters of introduction."

"And why, on that night, did you begin to think otherwise concerning Mr. Farefield's death?" asked Lady Saxondale, pale and motionless as a a statue, but her eyes burning like living coals as she kept them fixed upon the Cannibal.

"Because it struck me when I come to think of it afterwards," replied the man, with a look of sardonic significancy, "that for a lady to have that scent-bottle filled with stupifying stuff was a queer thing enow; and that if she had it, it could only be to use it—and that if she was bold enough to use it, it couldn't be for the very best of purposes. So putting two and two together, and remembering that your ladyship might have good reasons for putting Mr. Ralph Farefield out of the way nineteen years ago——"

"You dare not throw such an accusation at me!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale.

"Ah! but I do though—and within the last few minutes your own conduct has confirmed the suspicion."

"My conduct?" echoed her ladyship in mingled astonishment and alarm; for she was at a loss to conjecture the man's meaning, but feared that she had unknowingly committed herself.

"Why, the moment I spoke of Mr. Ralph Farefield, you turned round and looked at that door behind you," answered Chiffin, with a still more satanic significancy of look than he had ere now worn. "Where does that door lead to? Down into the vaults. And what have the vaults got to do with Ralph Farefield? Why, that he was drowned there. And if you hadn't a knowed this, why should you turn round so sudden and in such a guilty manner towards that door?"

"I did not—it is false—it is a mistake!" cried Lady Saxondale vehemently: but horrible distress was mingled with her impetuous excitement.

"Ah! but I say you did though," retorted Chiffin, "and you can't deceive me. If you knowed that Ralph Farefield met his death *there*, you must have had something to do with it; for if you had nothing at all to do with his death, you wouldn't have knowed he was there at all or how he died. That's as plain as possible. The word never knowed it: it was never put in the paper: all that was said was that he disappeared suddenly, and was supposed to have fled the country on account of his debts. But me and some pals of mine discovered him down there—fished him up—and sold him to a doctor."

Lady Saxondale gave an involuntary groan as the hideous, horrible, awful conviction was forced upon her that the deeds of the dreadful man who was in her presence had so mysteriously yet closely linked themselves with circumstances or associations belonging to her own career. Oh! to recall the past! But know: it was impossible. Was she—the proud, the haughty, the brilliant Lady Saxondale—constrained to linger here in discourse with the foulest of foul specimens of humanity? Yes—such was the necessity to which the dark incidents of her life had brought her: and therefore that groan—Oh! it expressed a world of horrible feelings, all conveyed through one deep, involuntary, hollow sound!

"Come, come, ma'am," said Chiffin, with coarse familiarity—and now the patrician lady shuddered from head to foot,—"don't take on so just because we're chatting over past things. You see that some events which happened in my life is pretty near connected with some of your'n. Well, I've, fathomed all about Ralph Farefield's business — and *that* is one reason why you won't attempt to do me a mischief. Another reason is——"

Lady Saxondale started convulsively: it was a movement the abruptness of which, and accompanied as it was by another anguished look, seemed to say, "What more, in heaven's name, can he know?"

"Another reason is," continued the Cannibal, observing the effect of his words, but taking a savage delight in showing the great titled lady how completely she was in his power—or at least how much he considered her to be,—another reason why your ladyship won't find it convenient to quarrel with me, and why you needn't talk again of calling up the servants, because you won't do anything of the sort——"

"But that reason?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, again speaking vehemently and impetuously; for the anguish she endured was crucifixion itself.

"Why, because as I heard a few days back in London, there was that housekeeper of your's——There! see how you start again——why, you're as pale as death——"

"Monster!" muttered Lady Saxondale between her set teeth: but her frame was quivering all over, and visibly too.

"What did you say?" growled Chiffin, with a ferocious leer. Something not over polite, I dare say. But no matter. I'm precious tough and can bear hard names — 'specially when I know the lady which utters them is so nice and comfortable in my power. But as I was saying, there was that housekeeper of your'n, which died so sudden. Was there nothing queer about *that*? It struck me so at the time: for a lady with as such excellent stupifying stuff in her possession, perhaps knows what poison is:—or else, may be, that same stuff poured down the throat, will do the job in a twinkling."

"Enough of all this!" said Lady Saxondale in a low hollow voice. "You *must* know that you are inventing the most detestable calumnies——"

"I'am afeard you would have some trouble to prove'em so before the beak at the Old Bailey," was Chiffin's cool response. "Why — do you think I've got no eyes? It was but a random sort of a shot that I fired when I talked about the housekeeper — Just a suspicion that had been hovering in my mind: but the shot took effect nevertheless—it hit home, and you feel it."

"Enough, I say!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, now stamping her foot with passionate excitement. "What are you doing here? why have you concealed yourself in this place? There is already a suspicion of something rife amongst the servants——"

"Ah! then I suppose I was twigged yesterday by that hulking footman," observed Chiffin, with a coarse laugh. "I rather suspected that he thought he saw something: but I slipped down the steps there, and hid myself. I dare say you think to yourself what a pity it was he didn't draw the bolt and lock me in: but I don't throw away chances like that:"—and as he thus spoke, the Cannibal produced from his pocket his housebreaking implements, — adding, "There's never a door in all England that I wouldn't open somehow or another."

"No matter! Tell me what you are doing here. You must depart. I know you will ask me for gold:"—and Lady Saxondale spoke with feverish rapidity. "Well, I will give you some. Tell me what you require——Be moderate however: for I departed somewhat hurriedly from London, and have brought but slender resources with me."

"Wait a moment," said Chiffin. "After what I know of your ladyship, I needn't be over nice or stop to mince matters about myself. It's all very well to tell me to be off from this place; but how do I know that I shan't be running into the lion's mouth?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the mistress of the castle hastily.

"I mean that as London might be rather too hot to hold me, I trudged off — got a lift down by the coach—and determined to take up my quarters here for a short time. I knowed that half the place was shut up; and wanting a little country air, I thought I couldn't do better than fix my quarters here. It didn't strike me that those flunkeys and ringletted damsels of your's would come to dust and air all the rooms; and so I was nearly being surprised. And I didn't think either, that I should have the honour and pleasure of seeing your ladyship so soon. Howsumever, in one word, whether I go or stay just depends on what they say in London upon a certain business. By the bye, you don't happen to have this morning's newspaper with you?"

"What do you mean? to what is all this to lead?" demanded Lady Saxondale, with less excitement and with more courage than before: for she was getting accustomed to the horror of the present interview.

"Why, I mean, is my name mentioned in any queerish kind of way in connexion with a little bit of a job——"

"Ah!" ejaculated her ladyship, recoiling with a dread loathing as the recollection of the barborous murder on the canal, of which her son had first spoken to her, but of which she had subsequently read, now flashed to her mind.

"Stop, don't go away!" cried the Cannibal, thinking that she was about to beat a retreat. "We hav'n't done our business yet. Will you answer me the question I've put? for the longer you delay, the longer you will be kept here."

"Was that your dreadful work?" inquired Lady Saxondale, gasping with horror as she looked upon the perpetrator of the hideous crime to which she was alluding: for whatever her own guilt might really have been, she was accustomed to contemplate *herself*, and therefore recoiled not from such self-contemplation: but from *another* who was deeply immersed in the blackest iniquities, she did recoil.

"What—the canal scene? Yes: if you must have it in plain terms, it was my business. And let me thank your ladyship for the use of the stupifying stuff, which did me good service on the occasion. They meant to do for me; but I done for them instead. But now, one word. Is there a hue and cry? Is it knowed? am I suspected?"

"No—I declare solemnly *no*, if I may judge from what I have heard and what I have read," answered Lady Saxondale. "Your name has never been mentioned in connexion with the deed. But now, will you depart? Say but the word, and I will give you means if you lack them."

"Well, since your ladyship tells me that I am safe, and that there's no hue and cry, I will take myself off. So if you have got a loose hundred or so that you don't know what to do with, you may give them to me. But mind—I am a good kind of fellow in my way; and so if ever your ladyship has any business you want done, just let me know. I'm always to be heard of at the sign of the *Billy Goat* in Agar Town, London. That's where I used to meet Ralph Farefield years back. A note directed to Mr. Chiffin—you needn't 'squire me—under cover to Mr. Solomon Patch, will be sure to reach me, and as I'm not likely to give up business altogether in my present way, even though I took a public or what not, as I have been thinking of, I shall always be ready to attend to your ladyship's orders. I want some good customers."

A horrible thought flashed through the mind of Lady Saxondale at the moment. Her daughter Juliana, recently become the object of her direst hatred, and in possession of a secret the revelation of which would at any moment create a terrific explosion, cover her with ignominy, and bring down the whole fabric of her plans with a terrific crash—Juliana, might be removed from her path, and before her was a wretch who would perform the deed! But no: Lady Saxondale could not induce her tongue to give utterance to the words which nevertheless trembled upon it; and it was with a strong revulsion of feeling that she resisted the temptation and triumphed over the idea of this new and stupendous crime.

"What is your ladyship hesitating for?" asked Chiffin. "Was you thinking whether there isn't some nice little business I might manage to do? If so, you needn't be nice about it. I dare say you can pay well; and there's nothing I wouldn't do for money. The next time you want to get rid of any body, a flooded vault mayn't be handy: and it would excite suspicion to have another sudden death like that of your old housekeeper. It must be a different sort of game—a knife across the throat, for instance: and as your ladyship's delicate hand mightn't like to do it, this here hand of mine is less partickler."

"For heaven's sake, silence! You are heaping horrors upon horrors!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, with an ice-cold shudder shooting through her frame: and again she succeeded in putting away the temptation to commit another crime. "Remain here—and I will fetch you the gold you require."

"Well, be quick then, if you mean me to be off."

Lady Saxondale sped away from the horrible presence of the Cannibal, and stole back to her chamber, with what feelings may be better imagined than described. Opening her writing-desk, she took forth a number of bank-notes and a quantity of gold: but as she was about to leave the room again, she felt so sudden a sensation of sickness and faintness come upon her, that she staggered and almost fell. She sought the toilet-table—filled a tumbler with water—and as the limpid draught was poured down her throat, it seemed to hiss as if passing over red-hot iron, so parched was that throat of hers! Refreshed however with the beverage, she gathered up the notes and gold in one hand, took the lamp in the other, and retraced her way to the chapel, in the vestiary of which she had left the ruffian intruder.

"Here," she said, "take this—and for heaven's sake be gone. If you are found within these walls I could do nothing to save you from being handed over to the grasp of justice."

"Well, you behave handsome enough and I won't bother you by staying here:"—but as Chiffin spoke these words, he thought to himself that from that time forth Lady Saxondale should prove the source of a handsome annuity for him, "Now, which way do you mean me to leave the castle?"

"Doubtless," answered the lady impatiently, "you are better able to decide that point than I."

"Leave it to me, then. One of them windows overlooking the river is the best plan: for I suppose you don't want me to follow your ladyship all through the inhabited part of the castle down to the front gate?"

"Not for worlds:" cried Lady Saxondale.

Chiffin bade her lead the way with the lamp, and quitting the chapel, they entered the nearest tapestried room. From one of the windows in this apartment the Cannibal lowered himself by the aid of a tree, the trunk of which grew out of the bed of the river itself, and whose enormous branches reached up to the casement whence he now departed.

"Don't forget the *Billy Goat* in Agar Town," whispered Chiffin, as he paused for a moment on the bough to which he had just paused forth.

"No, no," was Lady Saxondale's hurried response. "Away, away with you!"

"All right," responded the Cannibal. "Your ladyship needn't wait any longer:"—and he began to climb down the tree.

Lady Saxondale closed the window, and hastened back to her own apartment. There she sat down in a kind of bewilderment, scarcely knowing whether all that had just passed was a reality or a dream: but gradually as her ideas became collected, her thoughts disentangling themselves from the confusion into which they had been thrown, shuddered with indescribable horror at the quick retrospection which she cast over her interview with Chiffin. Good heavens! how completely was she in that miscreant's power! With a breath he could destroy her. These were her first and most natural reflections: but as she became still more tranquillized, her view of the subject changed; and gathering courage, she said to herself, "No! Coward, idiot that I was—I should have dared him! Who would believe any accusation from such foul lips as his against Lady Saxondale? The conduct of my whole life, as the world has read it, would give a denial to his averments and stamp them as the most odious calumnies, No: I am *not* in his power: it is ridiculous—it is absurd! And yet I am not sorry, after all," she continued in her musings, "that this meeting has taken place. It is as well to know where such a ready instrument of crime as that man is, may be found. Who can tell how soon I may need his succour? Dangers are gathering around me: I feel that it is so. I feel also that I must either succumb, or else with one bold stroke sweep from my path all who can interfere with my views, coerce, or intimidate me. Yes: it is as well to have learnt where that man is to be found. It is likewise as well to have assured myself that no phantom from the dead haunts the chapel, but that it was a living being of flesh and blood. But, Oh! what a being—what a monster!"

And again did a cold shudder pass through the frame of Lady Saxondale. But she no longer delayed to seek her couch; and though slumber soon fell upon her eyes, yet were the dreams that haunted her of a character to render that sleep but little refreshing.

On the following morning there were all kinds of rumours current throughout the castle. Some of the domestics who had set up in their rooms awhile ere seeking their beds, had been startled and affrighted by beholding lights glimmering from the windows of the passage on the opposite or western side of the quadrangle:

and some labourers who had returned home at a somewhat late hour, their way lying on the other side of the Trent, had also seen lights, from one of the chapel-windows as well as from the casements of the tapestry-chamber next to that chapel. Some portion of the domestics, who were not inclined to superstitious beliefs, put no faith in these statements: but the great majority—of course including those who had seen the lights—were firmly convinced that the western side of the castle was haunted.

When Juliana heard all these things, she smiled contemptuously: for she was no believer in the supernatural. But Lady Saxondale treated the matter in a more serious way,—indignantly rebuking the servants for what she was pleased to term "their silly fears." *She* could indeed well afford to do this, as she had no difficulty in explaining the mystery of the lights which had been seen glimmering from the passage, the chapel, and the tapestry-room on the western side of the castle.

CHAPTER LVI

THE ELOPEMENT.

We must now return to Constance Farefield, whom we left at the moment she fled so precipitately, closely followed by the faithful Mary-Anne in pursuance of the rapidly-whispered instructions given by her sister Juliana, she turned into the next street: and there she beheld a chaise waiting, with the Marquis of Villebelle standing near, anxiously expecting her arrival, She flew towards him: some hurried words of endearment were uttered by both, as he caught her hand and assisted her into the vehicle. He made Mary-Anne enter next: then, having given his orders to the driver, he himself leapt in—and the chaise drove away, Quickly did it dash through the streets in the direction of London Bridge—traversing which, it bore the fugitives to the station of the Dover Railway. Fortunately a train was about to start: three first class tickets were at once obtained; and a fee to the guard procured the accommodation of a compartment entirely to themselves. The bell rang—the doors of the carriages were closed in rapid succession—the shrill whistle blew—and away the train started.

Constance could scarcely believe that it was otherwise than a dream. To be thus emancipated from the rigid coercion of her mother—to be seated by the side of him whom she loved so well—and to have so suddenly as it were abandoned home, the world, the opinion of society and everything, for this one being in whom all her hopes were now centred,—all these constituted a gush of incidents appearing more like a fantastic vision of the night than a positive reality enacted in the broad daytime. But so it was: and Constance, throwing herself into the arms of the Marquis, wept for joy. The discreet Mary-Anne pretended to be looking very hard out of the window at the time; and though the billing sound of kisses certainly met her ears, yet she did not regard the fond embraces in which the lovers indulged.

When the first ebullition of feelings had thus found vent, the Marquis and Constance began to converse upon the plans which the former had already settled and digested in his own mind. So confident had been the hopes held out of the success of the stratagem devised for the emancipation of Constance, that the Marquis had made such arrangements as to permit his prompt departure from London in the manner just described: he had brought his trunks with him, and had taken out the requisite passports for himself, Constance, and Mary-Anne — and therefore proposed that they should make the best of their way to Paris, there to be united by the Chaplain of the British Ambassador. As in a whispering voice he thus communicated his plans to Constance, she listened with fond interest: but when he named the place where this marriage was to be solemnised for the satisfaction of her own scruples, she was struck by something like a presentiment of evil; for she recollected that it was *there* her beloved Etienne had five years back been so mysteriously united to a lady who was yet alive. The Marquis instantaneously comprehended the meaning of that sudden start which Constance gave, and why the colour forsook her cheeks, and why she flung upon him an almost frightened, deprecating regard: but he soothed her fears by the assurance that even if it were the same Chaplain, and if he recollected him, yet that the simple averment that the former Marchioness of Villebelle was dead would be sufficient to allay all scruples.

"And dead she is to me, as she has ever been from the moment of our marriage," whispered the Marquis in his fair companion's ear. "She herself will never claim me—never molest us. We have nothing to fear upon that head. Besides, dearest Constance, the moment our hands are united in Paris, we shall away to Madrid; and many, many years may elapse ere we seek the English shores again."

Now the young maiden's tears began to fall fast. She was reassured as to her transient alarm that their proposed union might experience some obstacles in the French metropolis: but she thought of the prospect of a long, long absence from the land of her birth and the sister whom she loved so well! For Edmund she certainly did not weep: neither had she any tears for any mother, smarting as she still was under the keen sense of Lady Saxondale's harsh conduct: but towards Juliana her mental looks were reverted with mingled longings and regrets. The Marquis of Villebelle understood the meaning of those tears; and fondly did he kiss them away from the damask cheeks down which they were flowing — so that Constance once more threw her arms about his neck, murmuring. "Pardon this transitory weakness! It is not that I repent the step I have taken. No, no: it is my destiny—and I accept it with cheerfulness."

It was in the middle of the day that the train reached Dover. Totally ignorant as they were of what had ensued immediately after the flight of Constance,—and not for an instant conjecturing that Lady Saxondale had in very spite, as well as in the morbid state of her feelings, quitted London all the same,—the travellers were fearful of pursuit. For might not Lady Saxondale reason with herself that the Marquis being a Frenchman, it was natural enough for him to elope with his fair companion to his own native country:—and they therefore saw that if a chase were really instituted in any direction, it would be in that which they had taken. This calculation had not from the first escaped the Marquis: but he had no alternative in respect to the route he thus took, inasmuch as his diplomatic appointment would be forfeited if he did not hasten to his post. Thus, with the fear of pursuit before their eyes, the travellers determined not to put up at any of the first-rate hotels in Dover, but to procure accommodation at some inferior though respectable tavern, the better to elude any inquiries that in the course of the day might be instituted in the town. For be it understood that they were compelled to remain in Dover until the following morning, there being no more steam-packets to leave during the day of their arrival.

On inquiring at the railway station where they alighted for such a tavern as would answer their purpose, they were recommended to the *Admiral's Head*; and thither did they accordingly repair. For precaution's sake the Marquis had put no name upon his boxes: and thus, beyond mere personal description, there was no very positive clue to their discovery in Dover. As they repaired to the tavern, they settled upon the feigned names which they should adopt while there,—the Marquis taking a French one, and Constance an English one; for as a matter of course they did not as yet pass as a married couple, and the difference of the nations to which they belonged prevented them from representing themselves as brother and sister. Indeed, it was arranged for the sake of delicacy and discretion that Mary-Anne should for the time being cease to be regarded as a mere domestic, but should be treated in the light of the friend of Constance, so that she might sit with them during the day in the same room, and occupy the same chamber with Constance at night.

They reached the *Admiral's Head*, whither the trunks were presently conveyed. The Marshalls received their guests with their wonted urbanity and attention, and while Kate—the handsome, joyous, merry-hearted Kate —conducted Constance and Mary Anne up to a chamber that they might arrange their toilet after travelling, the Marquis took the opportunity to draw old Marshall aside and intimate to him that one of the young ladies who accompanied him was to honour him with her hand on their arrival in Paris, and that he should be much obliged if no inconvenient answers were given to any inquiries that might possibly be made during the afternoon or evening at the tavern. Old Marshall was thus given to understand that it was an elopement: and as the intimation was accompanied by five guineas which were slipped into his hand he had no hesitation in promising "that the gentleman and ladies might make sure of his own discretion, and that of his family and servants, in the eventuality alluded to." The Marquis then ordered dinner to be served up presently, and ascended to the sitting-room allotted for the accommodation of himself and his companions.

When Kate Marshall descended into the bar-parlour, she found her father, her mother, and sisters talking of the guests who had just arrived at the house; and Kate was then informed of the intimation which the gentleman had given, and of the handsome present by which it was accompanied. She, in her turn, observed that the young lady with the fair hair was evidently of rank and station, but most amiable and affable—one who in a very few minutes would enlist the sympathies of those who came in contact with her. Thus was it that though perfect strangers to the Marshalls, our travellers had succeeded in making friends of them at once.

While they were yet conversing in the bar-parlour, a tall gentleman, somewhat past the middle age, and handsomely dressed, walked into the tavern, and desired to have a few minutes' private conversation with the landlord. This gentleman had been residing during the summer months at Dover, where he lived in excellent style with his wife and niece. He was a baronet—Sir John Marston by name. He had a florid complexion—bushy whiskers that were nearly gray—and at the first glance a certain frankness of look: but a closer regard would satisfy the observer that in the small gray eye and in the lines about the mouth there were the evidences of cunning and evil passions. The Marshalls knew him by sight, as also by name: but he had never before entered their establishment;—and the request that he made, in a somewhat peremptory way, for a private interview with the old man caused no little degree of astonishment. However, Mr. Marshall of course acceded to Sir John Marston's demand; and conducting him into a private room, awaited farther explanations.

"Do you know," inquired the baronet, glancing towards the door to assure himself that it was shut, "who the gentleman is that within the last quarter of an hour has arrived at your house?"

"What gentleman?" said Marshall, knowing very well who was meant, but not choosing to give a direct response.

"Why, the gentleman, to be sure, who came with two ladies—or I should rather say, judging by their looks, a lady and her maid."

"Ah! I believe we have some guests: but I didn't take any particular notice of them."

"Well, I *did* then," said the baronet; and I waited in the street to see whether they meant to stay here. I saw a quantity of luggage arrive soon after; and therefore I felt assured that they do propose to remain. Now, it suits my purpose to ascertain why that lady is accompanying this gentleman——"

"I beg, sir," interrupted Marshall, "that you will not attempt any interference with persons in my house; and if you think that I am going to play the spy upon them, you are very much mistaken."

"But I shall reward you well for the service I require of you" exclaimed the baronet, drawing out his purse and now condescending to a sort of familiar and coaxing tone.

"I don't take bribes," was Marshall's bluff reply for he was straightforward and honest after his own fashion—and having accepted the five guineas from his guest for a particular purpose, he would not have been tempted by fifty from the baronet to betray the confidence reposed in him.

"You surely cannot be so blind to your own interest?" urged Sir John Marston." I tell you that it is of the greatest consequence to me to ascertain——"

"I beg, sir, that our interview may end here," interrupted old Marshall. in a resolute tone and with determined look.

"Well then," exclaimed the baronet, drawing himself haughtily up, and resuming the demeanour of a superior towards an inferior, "take up this card to the Marquis of Villebelle ——for *that* is the real name of your guest, whatever he may call himself here——and tell him that I request an immediate interview. It is for his own interest that I am acting," added Sir John, perceiving that the old landlord hesitated to comply with his request.

"Mind you, sir," responded Marshall, "I don't know whether the gentleman up-stairs is a Frenchman or an Englishman—for he speaks English as well as you do: neither do I know anything about his being a Marquis: but I rather think he is nothing but a plain Mr. So, if you are wrong in supposing that you know the gentleman, you will of course take as final any answer he may send down to you."

"I will," was the baronet's emphatic reply. "This much I promise you. Take up my card."

Still old Marshall hesitated: but after some reflection he thought he had better do the baronet's bidding, particularly as the latter had assured him that it was entirely in the interest of the gentleman up-stairs. He therefore quitted the room where this interview took place, closing the door behind him. On issuing forth, he perceived his wife and daughters looking out of the bar-parlour in evident suspense as to what the mysterious interview could have been about. He therefore at once proceeded to join them, and in a few hurried words explained what had occurred. A rapid consultation was held, for all the Marshalls were entirely enlisted in favour of their guests up-stairs; but it was at length decided that the card should be delivered. Old Marshall was however one of those men who disliked missions of this sort and he therefore delegated his elder daughter Kate to perform the task for him. This she cheerfully undertook; and with the card in her hand, ascended to the apartment where the Marquis of Villebelle, Constance, and Mary-Anne were seated.

Entering the room and closing the door behind her Miss Marshall said, "If you please, sir, a gentleman has called who pretends that he knows you. He has sent up his card, and requests an immediate interview."

The Marquis received the card—glanced at the name—and immediately turned pale. Constance, who had anticipated something wrong the moment Kate began to speak, threw an anxious look of inquiry at her lover. The Marquis, having almost immediately recovered his self-possession, hastily whispered to Constance, "Do not be frightened;"—and then turning towards Kate, he said, "Tell me whether the gentleman who gave you this card has asked any questions. Pray be candid."

"I will, sir," responded Kate: and she then proceeded to explain what had taken place between her father and Sir John Marston, not forgetting to state that the former had refused the latter's proffered bribe,—a fact which Kate merely mentioned for the purpose of letting the lovers know that her family entertained friendly feelings towards them, and would rather assist than mar their plans.

"You may tell Sir John Marston to come up," said Villebelle, after a few moments' hesitation.

Kate Marshall accordingly quitted the room; and the Marquis immediately said to Constance in a low hurried voice, as he clasped her to his breast, "You must now prepare for a scene that may perhaps excite you, but acquainted as you are with all the incidents of my past life, there is nothing more that you have to learn——unless it be the names of those individuals—you know to whom I allude—I mean in the affair of my former so-called marriage. Take courage, Constance: there is no power to separate us, if you yourself be firm."

"Oh! that assurance has cheered me!" replied the young lady with tears on her cheeks, but a smile playing upon her lips.

"And now," added the Marquis, in a hurried whisper, "go and prepare Mary-Anne for whatsoever may happen——I mean in case those revelations with which you are already acquainted, should transpire during the coming interview."

Constance pressed her lover's hand, and glided across the room to place herself by the side of Mary-Anne, who was discreetly seated at the farther extremity: for the apartment was a large one. Almost immediately afterwards the door opened; and Sir John Marston entered the room. Constance threw upon him a quick glance to see whether she recognized him as one whom she had ever met in society: but he appeared a total stranger to her. Then she looked towards the Marquis, and saw that he had drawn himself up to his full height, and with a calm demeanour bowed coldly to the baronet.

The latter seemed somewhat excited, although it was evident that he endeavoured as much as possible to conceal his agitation beneath a haughty reserve. Looking back to assure himself that Kate Marshall, who escorted him up to the room, had closed the door behind him, he said, fixing his eyes with significant earnestness upon the Marquis, "It is necessary that I should speak to you alone."

"No, Sir John Marston," replied Villebelle; "whatever you may have to say must be spoken here in the presence of us all."

"Surely," responded the baronet, "you cannot be serious in what you say?"—and he glanced towards the corner where Constance and Mary Anne were seated.

"I am most serious," returned the Marquis in a firm voice.

"Then perhaps I have laboured under a misapprehension as to the footing on which this young lady"—again glancing towards Constance—"stands in respect to yourself?"

"If the idea you have formed upon the subject be an honourable one in respect to this young lady, it is correct but if the idea be a dishonourable one," added the Marquis, "it is most erroneous—and I hasten to dispel it".

"It is then as I thought," observed Sir John Marston. "In plain terms, it is an elopement—and this young lady entertains the hope of becoming the Marchioness of Villebelle".

The Marquis coldly bowed an assent.

"My Lord," at once resumed Sir John Marston "you surely will not compel me to push this unpleasant business any farther? The moment I saw that young lady in company with your lordship, I penetrated the object which you had in view: it was scarcely possible to mistake it:— for the young lady will not be offended with me if I observe that there is something in her appearance and her whole demeanour which to the man of the world at once forbids the entertainment of a dishonouring idea."

"Well, sir, I understand what you mean," said the Marquis. "It occurred to you that this lady is accompanying me to France to honour me with her hand? You see that I am not afraid to speak out. There is no necessity for disguise. It is as you say".

"But is it possible that this young lady," exclaimed the baronet, now becoming as much bewildered as agitated, "is acquainted with certain particulars ——your exact position, I mean——"

"She is, sir," responded the Marquis. "From her own lips may you hear the confirmation of my averment if you choose".

"Then there is indeed no necessity for disguise," quickly observed the baronet. "Madam," he added, advancing towards Constance, "you are aware that you are about to bestow your hand upon a person who is already married—that therefore the ceremony can be but the verlest mockery so far as you yourself are concerned—and that in respect to the Marquis himself it will subject him to the penalties attendant upon bigamy".

Constance felt much distressed at having the matter thus put in so plain and pointed a style; and although it assumed no more serious aspect than it had previously worn to her knowledge, yet it wounded her keenest sensibilities to have it thus submitted in so cold, deliberate, and businesslike a manner to her contemplation. But conquering her emotions, she said, "I beg, sir, that you will address none of your observations to me. As a perfect stranger, you have no right to control my actions:"—and then averting her head, she spoke aside to Mary Anne.

"It is impossible that this affair can be allowed to proceed," resumed Sir John Marston, again turning to Villebelle. "You are already married—and your wife is alive. It was but yesterday I received documentary proof of this fact. Here," continued the Baronet, producing a paper from his pocket, "is a receipt for a certain quarterly allowance which she enjoys, and which receipt was duly forwarded to me by my agent in London. Do you dispute the fact? do you doubt it?" he demanded emphatically.

"I neither dispute nor doubt it," responded the Marquis: "for within the last few weeks I myself have seen the lady to whom you allude. But to show you the value she attaches to the marriage-ceremony which took place between us five years ago, here is the certificate—here also are other documents connected therewith—all of which she sponataneously surrendered up to me. Wishing to be free herself, she has cheerfully done her utmost to emancipate me from the same bonds of thraldom which she threw off".

"Ah! she has done this?" ejaculated Sir John Marston becoming very pale; then, as the colour rushed back to his cheeks with the excitement of rage, he exclaimed, "No, no—I do not believe it! You have possessed yourself by foul means of those documents! Or else they are forgeries which you have prepared, the better to silence the scruples of your intended victim!"—and now he pointed direct towards Miss Constance Farefield.

"Sir John Marston," exclaimed the Marquis of Villebelle, "dare to address me in that language again, and I shall fling the lie in your teeth. Nay, more—you may consider that I do so now. And there is the door. Depart!"

"One word," said the baronet exercising a strong effort over his feelings. "You may possess the marriage certificate—you may possess other documents connected therewith—but still the marriage remains the same. It is registered at the Ambassador's Chapel in Paris: and so long as that record does exist, is the marriage binding and valid—unless indeed a special law should dissolve it. Now understand me well! I will keep close watch upon you—I will follow you and this young lady whithersoever you may go—and if you dare attempt to obtain the solemnization of a marriage-ceremony with her, I will stand forward to forbid its progress. Ah! I have terrified you now—and you begin to perceive that the matter is indeed more serious than you would appear to think it".

"Oh, Sir John Marston!" exclaimed Constance, now advancing, her hands clasped in earnest entreaty, "wherefore interfere with us thus? Your threatened conduct will amount to a bitter persecution——exposure, disgrace, and ruin will follow——Oh! Sir, I beseech you not to be thus cruel—thus merciless. John your entreaties to mine, Etienne," she cried, clinging to the arm of her lover.

"No, Constance I will not entreat," responded the Marquis with firm look and decisive tone. "If Sir John Marston pushes this affair to extremes, he must account to the world—account also to the tribunals of justice——"

"Beware, my lord: you touch upon the threshold of the secret which you have sworn not to betray!"

"A secret, Etienne?" echoed Constance, with a sudden glance of suspicion and reproachfulness at her lover.

"Sir John Marston merely alludes to the names of those who were interested in that marriage," was Villebelle's quick response. "Constance I have deceived you in nothing. I have told you everything except those names;—and yourself can tell Sir John Marston the assurance which I gave you—that I honoured the secret in respect to those names—that I deemed it invioldable—and that I did not even betray it to you."

"Let the names transpire if you will," exclaimed the Baronet, with ill-suppressed fury; I will prevent this second marriage at all risks——by heaven, I will!"

Thus speaking, he turned abruptly away—drew open the door violently—and was about to rush out of the room, when he stopped suddenly short exclaiming, "Ah! have we spies here?"—for he had caught sight of the retreating form of Kate Marshal as she flitted away from the vicinage of the door.

"Spies?" ejaculated the Marquis, disdainfully. "If there be any, they are in your employment."

The baronet said not another word, but hurried down stairs. In the passage below he met old Marshall, to whom he said in an angry voice, "Do you permit your daughters to play the part of eaves-droppers towards your guests?"

The old man made no reply, but turning on his heel, passed into the bar-parlour—and the baronet quitted the house.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE MISSIVE AND THE RESPONSE.

It was perfectly true that Kate Marshall had been listening at the door of the room in which the preceding interview took place. It was not through any impertinent curiosity; but because she had naturally apprehended some unpleasant scene: for although Sir John Marston had declared that it was entirely in the interest of the Marquis he had called, yet the shrewd keen sighted Kate had not failed to observe that the French nobleman (as she now knew him to be) turned pale and looked agitated the momoment the baronet's card was put into his hand. She therefore suspected that Sir John Marston's visit was not altogether of so friendly a character as he had wished to make it appear; and having had all her sympathies enlisted to an unaccountable degree on behalf of the lovers, she felt anxious to ascertain the nature of any impediment that might arise to interfere with the consummation of their happiness.

Kate had therefore listened: but as the conversation progressed within that room, it gradually assumed the form of a revelation to herself. Associating certain observations made by the Marquis and the Baronet, with a few circumstances already known to herself, she was enabled "to put two and two together," as the phrase is, and arrive at the solution of a mystery, Thus was it that as she listened she became more and more interested in what was taking place, and likewise found that she herself was being insensibly drawn in to play a part in the drama. The abrupt opening of the door by the baronet caused her to start away like a frightened deer; and not heeding the ejaculation of "Spies!" which burst from his lips, she sped up-stairs to her own little private bed-chamber on the highest storey of the house.

In this room the reader has already on a former occasion seen the gay, good-humoured, and handsome Kate Marshall. The chamber was prettily fitted up, and had an elegent French time-piece standing upon a chest of drawers. In the roof was the little trap-door of a foot square, kept shut by the very slight and flexible steel spring fixed underneath it. There was also the little tinkling bell—the rail a couple of feet below the trap-door—and in a cupboard the food requisite for the beautiful breed of pigeons which Miss Marshall possessed.

Immediately upon entering this chamber, Kate sat down: and taking writing materials from a drawer, together with a manuscript book affording the special initial letter belonging to that particular date, she penned a note; and although to the uninitiated eye it would have seemed a mere jargon more incomprehensible than Egyptian hieroglyphics, we are nevertheless enabled to explain its meaning to our readers. The contents therefore of this billet were as follow:—

"Dearest Friend,—The Marquis of Villebelle is here on his way to France with a young Lady whom he proposes to make his wife. Sir John Marston threatens to follow them unceasingly, and forbid the ceremony whereever they may seek to have it performed. From the various remarks let fall by them, and from some few circumstances of your own life which you have on occasions mentioned to me, I have no difficulty in recognizing your husband in the Marquis of Villebelle. What is to be done? or is anything to be done? Has the Marquis spoken truly that you have freed him to the extent of your power? I await your instructions.

"Your affectionate,
"C. M."

This note was penned in the most minute characters upon the tiniest piece of paper that would possibly serve for its contents. Kate folded it up in the smallest compass—tied a piece of silk round it—and then opening the trap-door, summoned her pigeons in a low, peculiar, but caressing tone of voice,—or rather with certain sweet melodious sounds sent forth from her charming lips. Three or four beautiful doves of the carrier-breed quickly answered her call, and perched upon the edge of the open trap-door. Her selection was promptly made; and extending her arm, the particular bird thus chosen at once hopped upon her wrist. Drawing it in, she closed the trap-door again—addressed the bird in fondling terms—and fastened the little billet under the right wing. Then she put the feathered messenger through the trap-door again. It at once soared up perpendicularly to a great height, so that for nearly a minute she kept it in view through that trap-door of only a foot square; and then she suddenly saw it dart off at a tangent in a north-western direction.

"If my fair friend be at home when the bird arrives," said Kate to herself, as she let the trap-door fly up again, "I shall receive an answer in a little more than a couple of hours."

She then descended to the bar-parlour, where she communicated to her parents and sisters all that she had overheard in the room occupied by her guests—the discovery she had thence made in respect to a certain intimate female friend—and the message she had just sent off by one of the carrier-pigeons. The Marshalls continued to discourse for some little time upon these matters: but it is not necessary to place their conversation upon record.

Meanwhile the Marquis of Villebelle had some difficulty in solacing his well-beloved Constance. The threats of Sir John Marston wore a very serious aspect to her mind. In short, she foresaw that if they were really carried out, they would have the effect of preventing any marriage-ceremony taking place at all;—and that he *would* persevere in his obstructive course, was to be inferred from the resolute tone and manner which he had adopted. But what was Constance to do? She felt that she was too seriously compromised to think of returning home: but on the other hand, if she remained with the Marquis, she feared that it could only be as his mistress. True, the marriage-ceremony could not be really looked upon as valid, if solemnized between them: but tt would nevertheless be a means of appeasing her last scruples ere she abandoned herself completely to her lover. We have already said that she was not so depraved as to be able all in a moment to make up her mind to accept the false and guilty position of a mistress, or to surrender her virtue in the intoxication of passion. Again and again therefore did she ask herself what she was to do; and it was with the utmost difficulty that the Marquis could succeed in tranquillizing her.

He pleaded his love and his honourable intentions—deeply deplored that the latter should stand a chance of being frustrated by the threats of Sir John Marston—but besought that Constance would not think of leaving him. At the same time he declared his readiness to make any sacrifice in order to insure her peace of mind; and he placed his destiny entirely in her own hands. There was a deep sincerity in his words and an earnest tenderness in his manner, that could not fail to make a powerful impression upon Constance. She looked around, and read in Mary-Anne's countenance the course which the abigail would have her follow: namely, to persevere in accompanying the Marquis, and not for a moment think of retracing her way to London. When a woman of no strong virtuous principle, loves deeply,—passionately, adoringly, devotedly loves,—it requires no inordinate strength of argument and no very miraculous combination of circumstances to induce her to consult her own happiness in preference to all other considerations: and Constance was not likely to prove an exception to the rule. Still it was not however without many inward struggles—many impassioned outbursts of grief—many copious floods of tears—many sobs and many sighs, that she at length made up her mind;—and throwing her arms around her lover's neck, she murmured, "Yes, I will be thine—thine under any circumstances: thine now—and for ever!"

An hour had passed since Sir John Marston quitted the room: and Miss Constance Farefield was at length comparatively tranquillized. She had resolved how to act; and thus had surmounted the principal cause of agitation. She had resigned herself to the current of her destinies, and was therefore no longer tortured with battlings and strugglings against the whelming tide of passion which hurried her on. It is true that she had been compelled to stifle the last whisperings of virtuous compunction in her soul; and therefore if she were not altogether satisfied with herself, but was forced to banish farther reflection from her mind, she was at least composed, resolute, and determined.

Kate Marshall now made her appearance,—discreetly knocking at the door, however, before she entered the apartment: for she naturally suspected that the scene with Sir John Marston could have produced no very agreeable effect upon the lovers, especially on the young lady; and she did not wish to surprise them in the midst of tears and the pouring-forth of consolations. She was however immediately bidden to enter; and she was as much pleased as surprised to observe the composed demeanour of the young lady in whom she felt so considerable an interest.

She came to ask if they were ready to have dinner served up; and the Marquis, having replied in the affirmative, said, "By the bye, can you tell me what Sir John Marston meant just now by some ejaculation which he sent forth in respect to spies?"

"I suppose," answered Kate, who, as the reader has seen on former occasions, had a great deal of ready effrontery,—"I suppose it was because I happened to be passing along the landing at the time. But I did not condescend to give any answer to the accusation which that rude man had the impertinence to fling out against me."

"At all events," said the Marquis, with a smile, "I think from what we have seen of you, if you had overheard anything, you would rather render us a service than do us an injury."

"I would—I would," replied Kate with a degree of emphasis that appeared also to have some deeper meaning in it.

She however immediately quitted the room, but presently returned accompanied by one of her sisters; and the two proceeded to lay the cloth for the repast that was now in readiness to be served up. The dinner was a good one; and although neither the Marquis nor Constance were much inclined to do justice to it, yet this was not the case with Mary-Anne, who failed not to convince the Miss Marshalls that she fully appreciated the culinary merits of the establishment. When she had superintended the placing of the desert upon table, Kate ascended to her little chamber to watch for the arrival of the feathered messenger whom she expected with the response to the billet borne by her own faithful and intelligent dove.

The beautiful French time-piece on the chest of drawers indicated that two hours and a half had elapsed since Kate despatched the billet, — when suddenly the little bell tinkled — the trap-door sank down — and the expected feathered messenger was received on her outstretched arm. It was not the same bird which she had sent off: that one had been kept to repose itself at its place of destination;—but this was of the same breed and as beautiful as her own. Caressing it fondly, she at once gave it water, and then proceeded to detach the little billet which it bore beneath its wing. The contents of this scroll, as tiny as her own missive, may be thus interpreted:—

"DEAREST KATE,—The Marquis of Villebelle has said nothing but the truth. I do not regard him as my husband. To the utmost of my power I emancipate him from all moral bonds, and would never appear against him to enforce legal ones. If Sir John Marston persist in molesting the Marquis, let him but breathe the talismanic words, *Lady Everton*' in the baronet's ear, and I shall be much astonished if they do not produce the desired effect.

"Your affectionate,
"E. C."

Having hastily perused this billet, Kate thrust it in her bosom, and then proceeded to administer food to the little messenger that had brought it. When she fancied the bird had eaten sufficiently, she caressed and fondled it for several minutes; and the intelligent little creature seemed pleased to nestle in her bosom, and put up its beak to her lips as if fully sensible that they were charming kisses which came from that rich red mouth. Then she let the bird issue forth through the trap-door, where it rested itself for some time in the little cote containing the saucers of food,—ultimately flying away of its own accord.

Provided with the important intelligence she had received, Kate hurried down stairs,—first of all descending to the room where her parents and sisters were seated, in order to communicate to them the contents of the missive. They were well pleased at the prospect of the lovers being enabled to emancipate themselves from the tyrannous power of Sir John, Marston whose overbearing conduct had rendered the Marshalls more zealous than at first in their determination to succour their guests to the utmost of their power.

Kate had now a delicate task to accomplish. She had to put the Marquis of villebelle in possession of the talismanic words that were to clear his path of Sir John Marston's obstructiveness: but at the same time she could give no explanations as how she had become possessed of such important information: for to no one, beyond her own family and those who were necessarily in the secret, did she ever reveal the mystery of the carrier-pigeons. She knew that she must expect to be questioned by the Marquis—but she prepared herself for the proceeding; and with the generous feelings of one who loves to do a kind action, ascended to tho apartment where the guests were seated. The moment she entered the room, the Marquis, Constance, and Mary Anne all three saw by her countenance that she had something of importance to communicate, and that it was of no disagreeable character.

"I hope you will pardon me," she said addressing herself to the Marquis, "for the liberty I am taking in interfering in your own private affairs: but as you will presently perceive, it is with the very best intentions. In short, I think that I could effectually help you in setting Sir John Marston at defiance——"

"Oh, if this be possible!" exclaimed Constance, rising from her seat and advancing towards Kate with an effusion of gratitude.

"Yes," said the young woman, "I am convinced that you need entertain no farther fear of molestation on his part, if my advice be followed. To tell you the truth," she added, with an arch and roguish smile which displayed two rows of splendid teeth, "I did happen to overhear something of what passed just now: but I declare upon my honour it was only through kind feelings that I listened."

"We will forgive you all that," said the Marquis good-naturedly, "provided that you can really render us the immense service alluded to."

"I can—I will," answered Kate. "I had some such purpose in view when I gave a similar assurance just before dinner."

"And what are we to do? what advice is it that you have to give us?" asked Constance. "Speak, my dear friend—for such indeed you are proving yourself to us."

"A very few words will explain my meaning,", responded Kate Marshall. "It is in fact by a sort of talismanic mystery you are to act. Let the words '*Lady Everton*' be simply breathed in Sir John Marston's ear, and he will molest you no more."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed the Marquis and Constance both in the same breath: and then the former immediately added interrogatively, "But what virtue can exist in the mere mention of that name?"

"You must ask me no questions," replied Kate. "Do as I tell you."

"Then are we to understand that you yourself are acquainted with certain mysreries in connexion with the baronet?"

"You are to understand nothing more than what I have chosen to tell you. And now," added Kate, with another arch smile, "your happiness is in your hands: for I am enabled to assure this lady that she who might perhaps assert a prior claim to his lordship's affection, waives that claim altogether—leaves him free and unshackled—emancipates him to the utmost of her power—releases him from all moral obligations towards herself—and gives a solemn pledge never to appear in a legal sense against him".

As the reader may well suppose, the Marquis, Constance, and Mary-Anne gazed in speechless astonishment upon Kate Marshall as she made these announcements.

"Is it possible then," at length cried Villebelle, "that you are acquainted with her of whom you are speaking?"

"I know her well—intimately," responded Kate. "We were at school-together at Southampton—we have frequently met of late years——But no matter: I am not going to enter into any particulars. Suffice it to say that I have put you in possession of a talisman which will reduce your tyrannical enemy to quiescence. And now, the sooner your lordship puts the value of the talisman to the test, the better. Your minds will then be all tranquillized."

"But how are we possibly to express our gratitude to you?" asked Constance, flinging her arms round Kate's neck and embracing her warmly.

"Excellent-hearted young woman that you are," said the Marquis, "we shall never forget you!"

"Who knows but that your lordship may some day or another be able to do me a service?" responded Kate, speaking thus rather for the purpose of escaping from farther effusions of gratitude, than because she really attached any special meaning to her works.

She was about to hasten from the room when the Marquis called her back to inquire where Sir John Marston resided. She mentioned a particular address on the Marine Parade; and the Marquis declared his intention of proceeeding thither at once. Kate left the room; and Villebelle, having embraced the now overjoyed Constance, issued forth from the hotel. In the street he saw a person, looking like a footman in plain clothes, loitering about; and it immediately struck him that this was a spy whom Sir John Marston had planted there to watch the movements of himself and Constance. The suspicion was confirmed, when, as the Marquis continued his way along the street, the individual in question followed him. Villebelle however did not show that he noticed the circumstance: for if Kate's talismanic words should prove effective, there would be a speedy end to this espionage.

The Marquis had to inquire his way to the Marine Parade, being almost a stranger in Dover. He however speedily reached the handsome row of house fronting the sea, and knocked at the door of the one which he had been directed. In response to his inquiry, he was told that Sir John Marston was at home; and he was immediately conducted into a handsomely furnished apartment, where the baronet was seated at a table with an open writing-desk before him and examining a number of papers.

"Ah! I presume you are come to signify your submission?" said the baronet, with a look of ill repressed triumph, the moment the Marquis made his appearance.

"It may perhaps be otherwise," returned Villebelle drily, We shall see. Permit me to remark that it must be a proceeding of a strange character that makes it an object of importance to you, even at the present day, whether I contract another marriage or not——"

"Remember our compact, Marquis! Five years have elapsed since the occurrence took place, and you are as much bound to observe it now as you were then. You were to ask no questions—demand no explanations——"

"True," interrupted Villebelle: "but what if things have come to my knowledge without my seeking them?"

"What mean you?" suddenly demanded Sir John Marston, as he started up from his seat: but instantaneously resuming it again, he said in a satirical manner, "You fancy that by throwing out random hints and inuendos of this kind you will terrify me. It is useless. I tell you that I have my own reasons for desiring that there should be but one Marchioness of Villebelle in the world."

"And I tell you in return, Sir John Marston," replied Etienne, "that I will no longer adhere to a compact of so unholy, so unnatural a character. It is monstrous, to suppose that I will do so. My necessities were taken advantage of at the time——"

"Yes—you were in that bitter plight that you would have sold your soul to Satan," responded Marston: "but as you have made the compact, so must you abide by it. Now, I do not wish to be on unfriendly terms with you. It is the first time we have met since the marriage took place in Paris. I then promised that I would not lose sight of you; but I have been abroad the whole time until within the last two or three months, during which I have remained in the seclusion of this watering-place. Perhaps, then, I have neglected you—perhaps I have been regardless of my promise: but I am now willing to make amends. Say, do you require money?—for if by preventing this second marriage of your's I disappoint your hopes in clutching the fortune of an heiress——"

"Enough, enough, Sir John Marston!" exclaimed Villebelle indignantly. "You doubtless judge others by yourself. I have no such mercenary motive. The young lady whom you saw just now, has no fortune that she can call her own. But enough, I say, of this parley: it is beneath me to remain bandying words with you here. I give you due warning that if you continue the aggressor, you may perhaps bitterly regret the retaliation it will be in my power to offer. Ah! you seem to doubt me still?"—then after a brief pause, during which he looked Sir John Marston fixedly in the face, Villebelle said "Perhaps the name of *Lady Everton* may convince you that it is no idle threat which I fling out."

The baronet half started from his seat, but sank down into it again; and falling back in the chair gazed upon the Marquis of Villebelle in speechless dismay—so that the lover of Constance at once saw that the talisman did indeed possess the virtue which had been ascribed to it.

"How came you to learn this?" asked the baronet in a deep hollow voice: and indeed the effect which the mention of that name had thus produced was even greater than Villebelle had anticipated—for there were the mingled ghastliness and blankness of utter despair in the baronet's countenance.

"No matter—ask me no questions," responded the Marquis, assuming the tone of assurance which would be adopted by one conscious of wielding an immense power over another.

"But she——your wife——does she know all this?" asked Sir John, his manner now suddenly changing into the excitement of the liveliest anxiety and suspense.

"I will tell you nothing" rejoined Villebelle. "Ask me more questions. Suffice it to say that it is not I who seek to quarrel with you."

"And therefore whatsoever you know you will keep to yourself?" eagerly interjected the baronet.

"Ah, your spy I perceive!" said the Marquis coldly, as he fixed his eyes upon the window, from which happening to glance forth, he beheld the person who had followed him from the vicinage of the *Admiral's Head*.

"He shall watch you no more." the baronet hastened to observe. "I will dismiss him at once. You see," he added with nervous excitement and fawning cringingness, "I am willing to be on friendly terms with you if I can."

Thus speaking, Sir John Marston hastened to the window—tapped at the pane—and made a sign for the man to enter the house. He himself then hastened out of the room to open the street-door and give the individual admittance: having done which, he remained speaking a few moments in the hall with him.

Meanwhile the Marquis of Villebelle had turned away from the window, and walked carelessly across the room, inwardly rejoicing that Kate Marshall's talismanic words should have produced so signal an effect. Passing by the table, his eyes fell upon the numerous papers scattered upon the desk and round about it: and at the very instant he was about to withdraw his glance with the instinctive aversion of an honourable-minded man to pry into secret documents, his looks encountered a name upon one of the papers that at once riveted them there. All scruples vanished in a moment: he looked closer at the paper—read half-a-dozen lines—and then with an ejaculation of astonishment, turned aside again and advanced towards the window.

The next moment Sir John Marston reentered the room; and carefully closing the door, he accosted Villebelle, saying, "You will be molested by that person no longer. I have ordered in wine—you must drink with me as a proof that you are not in downright enmity against me."

"Sir John Marston," responded Villebelle, "such words have passed between us this day as to render it impossible that we can sit down together in a friendly manner. I can only repeat, that if it be an understanding between us at this moment that we abstain from mutual molestation, I will adhere to that compact."

"Yes, yes—be it so, be it so!" replied Marston, still labouring under a nervous excitement: and changed indeed was the manner of the man from what it was in its domineering tyranny at the *Admiral's Head*, and from its sneering scornfulness when Villebelle first entered the room where they now stood together.

"I wish you good evening, Sir John Marston," said the Marquis, bowing coldly and moving towards the door.

"One word!—do let me have one word more with you!" exclaimed the baronet, whose ideas were evidently in a state of cruel bewilderment. "Do you know—I beseech you to tell me do you know where your wife dwells? ——or shall I say the lady who was once your wife——for I know not now how to speak of her. Tell me, if you be acquainted with her abode—I beseech you to tell me——"

"Again I say good evening, Sir John Marston:"—and the Marquis of Villebelle, with a still colder and haughtier bow, quitted the room,—the baronet making no farther effort to detain him.

On his way back to the *Admiral's Head*, the Marquis could not help wondering in what consisted the talismanic effect of the mere name of Lady Everton. That it had been potent to quell the proud spirit and level the haughty assurance of Sir John Marston, was evident enough. Nor less did the Marquis of Villebelle ponder upon the extraordinary revelation that had been made to him by the paper at which he had glanced on the desk. Yet this afforded him no clue to the reading of the other mystery: or if for a moment it engendered a suspicion, it was one which there was no other circumstance to confirm. But that the lady whom he had married five years back in Paris, had experienced a strange destiny—perhaps most wrongful treatment—he could not help thinking.

On arriving at the *Admiral's Head* he gave a quick nod of intelligence to Kate who looked out of the door of the bar-parlour; and she saw that all was well. He rushed up-stairs; and the fervid embrace in which he at once strained Constance, as well as the glow of joyous animation upon his handsome countenance, convinced her and Mary-Anne that there was nothing more to fear.

That evening, after Constance and her faithful attendant had retired to the chamber provided for them, the Marquis sat down and wrote a letter. This he sealed—but placed no address upon it. He then rang the bell, and summoned Kate to the room.

"I have a favour to ask you," he said as soon as she made her appearance. "It is evident that you are acquainted with the lady who, if she chose, might have called herself the Marchioness of Villebelle, but who has so generously released me from all the trammels of that mysterious marriage. Tell me—are you acquainted with her address? I am sure you must be. But I do not wish you to mention it to me: indeed it were perhaps better not. The favour I ask is that you will forward this letter to her."

"I will do so, my lord," replied Kate receiving the sealed epistle from his hands.

"And now, Miss Marshall," resumed Villebelle, "let me once more express to you my gratitude——"

"Oh! I require no thanks, my lord," she exclaimed. "You have alredy rewarded my father liberally: and behold!" she added, raising her hand and displaying a beautiful ring upon one of her well-formed fingers: "I have just received this as a memento from that beautiful and amiable young lady who indeed merits all your love. I did not mind accepting the ring, because it is a gift that one might take under such circumstances; and moreover, it was so kindly given. But without the slightest prospect of reward should I have acted just as I have done. I sincerely wish your lordship all possible happiness."

Kate Marshall then quitted the room: and soon afterwards the Marquis of Villebelle retired to his own chamber. On the following day, at about eleven o'clock, the Marquis, Constance, and Mary-Anne, took a kind leave of the Marshalls and embarked on board the steam vessel for Calais. They experienced no molestation of any kind: nor did it appear that their movements were watched by spies. From Calais the journey was immediately pursued to Paris; and on the day after their arrival in the sovereign city of France, they repaired to the British Ambassador's Chapel to pass through the matrimonial ceremony. The chaplain proved to be the same who had pronounced the marriage-blessing—(what a mockery it was)—upon the Marquis of Villebelle and his first wife. The circumstance of the former marriage was at once remembered by the reverend gentleman; and the Marquis assured him that there existed no impediment to a second alliance. This averment was sufficient,—the social position of the Marquis and the fact that he had recently been appointed to a diplomatic situation at the Spanish Court, being considered ample guarantees for his respectability and honour. The ceremony was therefore solemnized; and Constance now called herself Marchioness of Villebelle.

In the afternoon she wrote a long letter to Juliana, which she directed to Saxondale House, not thinking that her mother would after all have persevered in the originally contemplated visit into Lincolnshire. Early the next morning the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle, attended by Mary-Anne, and by a valet whose services had been engaged on sufficient recommendation, set out on their journey towards the Spanish frontiers: and in due time they reached the city of Madrid without experiencing any more adventures worthy of narration.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE RECREATION AND THE HORRORS OF LONDON LIFE.

It was about half-past nine o'clock in the evening, that Lord Harold Staunton, having dined quietly at his own lodgings in Jermyn Street, sauntered forth with his cigar; and passing down the Haymarket, he encountered his friend Lord Saxondale.

"I was just going up to your place, Harold," said the dissipated young nobleman. I thought perhaps you would want company, and we might make another night of it together——"

"Upon my word, Edmund," observed Staunton, as the former took his arm and walked on with him, "you are wonderfully unconcerned at what took place yesterday."

"Ah! about Constance? Well, what does it matter, so long as she marries the Marquis? Give me a light for my cigar."

"But they say that the Marquis is already married," returned Harold. "I have heard your mother herself say so."

"Oh! my mother will say anything when it suits her purpose," exclaimed Lord Saxondale. "I suppose she didn't want Constance to marry this Frenchman: and so she invented that tale."

"But if it should happen to be true," said Lord Harold: "what then? Now, to tell you the truth,—no matter what I myself may be, I should be furiously indignant against any one who dared to inveigle away a sister of mine."

"What would you have me do?" demanded Saxondale.

"Why, hasten after the fugitives, to be sure—see that they are really married—and if so obtain proofs from the Marquis that it is all a calumny about his former alliance: and if he can't or won't give you satisfaction in this way, then you must seek it in another."

"What! shoot him through the head, and so make my sister a widow at once?' ejaculated Saxondale, by no means relishing the advice he had just received. "Come, come, Harold—you know very well that I am no coward: but it would be the height of folly to rush madly into such a scrape as this. Besides, a man who is descended from ancestors in the time of the Tudors, can't place himself on a level with a beggarly French Marquis——"

"But I, Edmund," interrupted Staunton with some degree of bitterness, "though belonging to a family as ancient as your own, put myself on a level the other day with an obscure artist, who could scarcely be called a gentleman—much less a nobleman."

"Well, if you were fool enough, my dear Harold, to let my precious lady-mother hurry you into that unpleasant business, I can't help it. It's no reason why I should be equally imprudent,"

"I see that the less we talk upon this subject, the better," observed Staunton. "But was not this resolution of your mother's to rush off into Lincolnshire somewhat sudden?"

"It was. But I don't bother myself much about her. Come, what are we going to do to-night? I am in the humour for amusement. To-morrow I have got an appointment with Morlow and Malton about having all my debts paid, and settling about a good monthly allowance till I come of age: so I have every reason to be in the best possible spirits."

"I recollect you told me how you reduced your mother to submission. You have to thank me for putting you in possession of that secret."

"And so I do thank you, my dear Harold. It was most fortunate, the discovery of that Spanish costume! Ah, you should heve seen how queer my mother looked the moment I told her of it. But what are we going to do, I again ask? Suppose we take a look in at the Cider-Cellar".

"With all my heart," responded Harold. "I feel rather dull and out of sorts this evening, and shall be glad of some rational kind of amusement. I am in no humour for getting into disturbances with the police, or losing money at the gambling-table: and therefore I will gladly adopt your suggestion."

The two young noblemen sauntered towards Maiden Lane, In the immediate vicinage of Covent Garden. A lamp over an ample doorway, and bearing the words "CIDER CELLAR" upon the glass, denoted their destination. Descending a spacious staircase, into a region which though beneath the level of the ground, had nothing of subterranean gloom about it, they threaded a well-lighted passage, and entered a large room, which we purpose to describe for the benefit of those readers who may not be as familiar with the place as were Staunton and Saxondale.

Although approached by this subterranean passage, the room itself,—or indeed it deserves the denomination of a hall,—is nearly as lofty as the house to which it is attached, or any of the adjacent tenements. Its length and width are in due proportion with its height; and it has altogether a cheerful and handsome appearance. The decorations are simple, but in the best possible taste. There is a fine mirror at each extremity, and in the evening the place is completely flooded with the lustre of numerous gas-lamps. Three paralleled lines of tables run the whole length of the immense apartment; and at the further end a platform is raised for the chairman, the pianist, and the vocalists engaged to contribute to the entertainment of the company. As a matter of course the assemblage is somewhat of a miscellaneous character: for there may be seen the polished gentleman and the consummate snob—the unaasuming visitor, as well as the insufferable coxcomb—the well-to-do tradesman and the debauchee aristocrat—together with a pretty tolerable sprinkling of the class known as "gents." But the place is eminently respectable, and is conducted with a degree of decorum which prevents the developments of snobism and gentism from proving a source of general annoyance. On each side of the three lines of table the company are seated; and there is as miscellaneous an assortment of beverages as of guests. Some may be seen drinking wine—others spirits-and-water; others are slaking their thirst with malt liquors, draught or bottled—while others again are expanding into the complacent good-humour produced by peculiar compounds known in that region by the name of "seductives." Some may be sesn partaking of suppers, which are served up with most agreeable promptitude after the order is once given and in a way to tempt the most fastidious appetite. The staple commodity for these little refections appears to be the Welsh-rabbit; but devilled kidneys, scolloped oysters, chops, and steaks, accompanied by baked potatoes, likewise receive considerable patronage. Almost every body appears to smoke at the Cider-Cellar; and it is the sole business of one of the waiters to hand round a box of Havannah's choicest produce. By the way, speaking of waiters, we may add that the attendance is unexceptionable.

At the table on the platform may be seen the chairman with the official hammer in his hand. On his right and left are the vocalists who contribute to the entertainment of the evening. Let it not be supposed that these are mere pot-house singers who give their services in consideration of their supper and their grog: they are of a much higher class, well known in the musical world, and engaged at handsome salaries by the spirited proprietor of the Cider-Cellar. The pianist too is a remarkable character in his way, not merely with the somewhat singular appearance made by his white hair, his coloured glasses, and his black moustache, but by his professional talent.

The entertainment generally commences at about ten o'clock in the evening; and up to eleven there is an almost uninterrupted succession of songs. At this hour the apartment is sure to be well filled; and a sort of sensation begins to take place. Those who possess watches, look at them with the air of persons who evidently know that some particular treat is at hand; and those who are not fortunate enough to own these indicators of time, anxiously ask the possessors thereof "whether it is eleven yet?" Several of the guests leave their seats in order to get nearer to the platform: Welsh-rabbits and devilled kidneys are suffered to get cold, while the supper-eaters catch the infection of the general excitement and look towards the platform with as much eagerness as if the curtain of a theatre were about to draw up and reveal the scenic attractions of the stage.

The chairman now announces that "Mr. Ross will appear in his favourite charactar of Sam Hall." Then ensues a tremendous clapping of hands and thumping of knuckles upon the table, so that the glasses all seem as if suddenly attacked with St. Vitus's dance, and even the huge metal jugs of hot water appear inclined to perform a fandango. In the midst of this hearty tumult the vocalist whose name elicited the applause, appears from behind a screen, dressed as ragged, dirty, wretched-looking man, with a battered hat on his head, a pipe in his hand, and his countenance made up to an expression of a dark, dismal, but at the same time fierce despair. This is the personification of Sam Hall, the hero of the song. He is supposed to be a man condemned to die; and the whole performance constitutes a tremendous illustration of the horrors experienced by the mind of a doomed being. It is no exaggeration to declare that this is perhaps the most terrific revelation of what fancy might depict as passing within the walls of a condemned cell, that is possible to conceive. All the power of the *artiste* is thrown into the impersonation of his ideal character; and the effect upon the larger portion of the company is immense, True it is that some individuals, of the snob and the gent class, incapable of being affected by the awful solemnity of the scene, behold only a ludicrous representation therein, and exhibit their vile taste by means of laughter. But with the generality of the spectators the feeling is one of the profoundest awe. Though the performer be chiefly noted as a first-rate comic singer, yet there is no comedy in his personification of Sam Hall; it is all but tragedy—deep, appalling, stupendous tragedy, The illimitable horror alternating with darkest despair that he throws into his features, rivets the gaze and seizes upon the mind as if with a spell. The man who is opposed to the punishment of death, beholds in that scene an unanswerable argument in support of his philanthropic views: while the individual who has previously cherished the revolting prejudice in favour of the capital penalty, must, if he havs any feeling at all, retire from that scene with a changed opinion.

Such is a description of the Cider-Cellar, and an outline of the entertainments that may be met with there. It was in this place that Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale whiled away a couple of hours on the evening of which we are speaking. Staunton,—who though a through rake and an unprincipled profligate, nevertheless had some generous qualities,—was much moved by the impersonation of Sam Hall: but Saxondale, who had not a single kindly feeling was one of the few that upon this occasion had the bad taste to laugh. But then he was not merely devoid of the feeling, but likewise of the capacity to comprehend the deep tragic meaning of the scene.

On issuing forth from the Cider-Cellar, Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale walked slowly on, exchanging their remarks upon all that had taken place. The clock of St. Paul's Covent Garden, was proclaiming the hour of midnight—much too early for these scions of the aristocracy to think of retiring to rest as yet. They paused in Covent Garden, and deliberated what they should do to amuse or divert themselves.

"I tell you what, Edmund," said Lord Harold, "an idea has suddenly struck me. I was reading in the newspaper this morning something about the low dense and lodging-houses in certain streets at no great distance. What say you?—shall we go and pay them a visit?"

"I don't much fancy it," replied Saxondale: "for I think we are pretty sure of getting into a scrape—perhaps robbed and well thrashed. Not that I am a coward, you know, Harold : but——"

"You like to be safe:"—and there was a tinge of a sneer in Staunton's accents: then he immediately added, "We should want a guide, and might therefore take a policeman with us. There goes one at this moment."

The two young nobtemen accordingly hastened after the constable who was proceeding a-head; and he, hearing hasty footsteps behind, quickly looked back. At once recognizing Staunton and Saxondale who were frequently getting into disturbances with the police, the officer drew his truncheon, telling them "that he knew them well and they had better mind what they were about." This made Saxondale laugh heartily with continuous cachinnations of his cracked voice. But Lord Harold speedily convinced the constable that their object was on this occasion pacific. The officer accordingly put back his truncheon; and Staunton proceeded to explain the object he and his companion had in view.

"Well, my lords," replied the policeman, I am just this minute going off duty; and if you will tell me where you will be in about half-an-hour, I will just slip on a plain coat and hat and come and join you."

Staunton intimated that they would walk about Covent Garden and smoke their cigars. The officer accordingly went his way; and true to his promise he re-appeared in plain clothes at the expiration of the time specified.

"Now, my lords," he said, "I will take you first of all to a kinchin-ken."

"And what the deuce is that?" inquired Saxondale.

"It's a place where boys and gals live together. It's kept by a woman and her two daughters—a precious rum lot, I can tell you. The woman's a hempen widder——"

Again an explanation was demanded.

"It means, my lord, that her husband was hung. He was a cracksman——that means a burglar——by profession, and one of the most desperate willains that ever lived. It's a matter of ten year ago that he was tucked up; and his old o'oman took to keeping a kinchin-ken. Her name is Burley——Mother Burley they call her. Her daughters ain't the most moral young women in the world, as your lordships may suppose. They have both got their fancy-men—reglar rum 'uns. Biddy Burley, the eldest, is the blowen of Mat the Cadger; and Polly Burley, the youngest, has spider Bill for her flash man. These chaps are the greatest thieves in London, and have been a many times on the everlasting staircase———that means the treadmill."

While the police-constable was thus running on with the details of his information relative to the Burley family, he had conducted the two noblemen away from Covent Garden, into a dark narrow, sinister-looking street leading out of Drury Lane. As they passed along, they suddenly came upon an individual who was leaning with his back against the closed gateway of a wheelwright's workshop, as appeared by the white letters painted on the doors, and on which a light from the window of the opposite house was streaming full. The man leaning there was respectably dressed, and was smoking cigar. The policeman stopped short, and said to him, "Well Harry—watching this place still—eh?"

"Yes: and likely to watch it too," was the response. "Uncommon tedious work, I can tell you. But stay—the door's opening!"

As he thus spoke he kept his eyes fixed on the opposite house whence the light was streaming. The constable and the two noblemen looked in the same direction. The light now disappeared from the window, the sound of bolts drawing back and a chain let down continued to be heard for a few moments; then the floor opened—and an old man of very sordid and sinister appearance came forth. He threw a glance across the narrow street at the group assembled opposite his door, and gave a low mocking laugh which sounded horrible as a death-rattle. Closing the door, the old man proceeded along the street, and the individual who had been addressed by the name of Harry, at once followed him.

"What's all this mean?" asked Lord Saxondale of the constable-guide after a few moments' silence.

"That place," answered the police-officer, pointing to the dwelling whence the old man had issued, "is a receiving house for stolen goods; and that old feller is the receiver himself. We call him a fence, and he's one of the sharpest in London. The man Harry that I spoke to and that's gone after him, is an officer of the Detective Force; and he will follow the old fence wherever he goes, no matter how long he may be absent. There's three of the Detectives that's appointed for this special service—to keep watch night and day; and they take their turns. This has been going on for the last five months, and will cost the country a peecious sum of money."

"But can't they bring anything positive home to the old man, so as to get him punished at once?" asked Staunton.

"No. Since he's been watched he takes too good care of *that*," replied the constable. "Besides, that's not so much the object—although of course if there was a cause he would very soon be took up. The chief object is to force him out of the neighbourhood, and make him break up his establishment."

"I was not aware that the Police Commissioners possessed such power," observed Lord Harold.

"Power?" echoed the constable. "Bless your lordship, the Commissioners can do anything. And so can us constables too for that matter," added the officer, with a laugh: "for we know very well that the magistrates are sure to take our part, unless it's something very outrageous indeed. But even then there's generally a loophole found for us to creep out of. This way, my lords—and here we are."

While thus speaking, the constable had led the two noblemen round a turning into another street of even a more sinister appearance than the one they had just quitted; and they had halted at the door of one of the blackened cut-throat-looking houses that formed the street. The constable knocked at the door: but some minutes elapsed ere it was opened; and during this interval the sounds of numerous juvenile voices reached their ears from within, resembling the uproarious mirth of a school that is breaking up for the holidays.

At length the door was opened by an ill-looking bloated young woman, of about five-and-twenty. Her hair seemed in as much disorder as if she had been creeping through a hedge: a dirty faded cotton gown hung loosely upon her; and being open in front, left her coarse bosom indecently exposed. She evidently had no stays on, and indeed appeared to have no under-garments of any kind. Her dirty stockings were dangling down: and her feet were thrust into an old pair of shoes trodden at the heels, so that they pattered on the floor like clogs when she walked. She held a candle in her hand—and had a half-tipsy look, as if she had been disturbed in the midst of a revel. She however immediately recognized the policeman: but not the least abashed nor troubled—on the contrary, with immense effrontery—she asked him, with a horrible imprecation, what he wanted?

"Just to show these gentlemen your place Biddy," replied the constable.

"That's all gammon," answered the woman. "You're after some of the kinchins——"

"'Pon my honour I'm not," rejoined the officer, then in a whisper, aside to the noblemen, he said, "You had better give Biddy Burley a tip, my lords."

Saxondale, who was always ready to flash his money ostentatiously, drew out his purse and gave the woman a sovereign, at sight of which her countenance cheered up wondrously; and she said, "My eyes! you *are* swell coves, and no mistake. Come in, and you shall see the ken."

The two noblemen and the police-constable passed into the house, and found themselves in a narrow passage that went perceptibly sloping down towards a staircase at the end. All this time the sounds of voices had continued to be heard in unabating uproariousness. Shouting, screaming, laughing, swearing, singing, and quarrelling, seemed to be going on in every part of the house, as if it were a veritable pandemonium of little demons. Biddy Burley shut the street-door, and throwing open one leading into the ground floor front room, said, "Here's some swell coves come to see the place. But they doesn't belong to the 'Ligious Track S'iety, cos they're smoking cigars and doesn't wear white chockers."

"So much the better. I can't abear them sneaking, snivelling, canting chaps which only comes to see the young gals in bed, and makes a pertence of 'stributing their papers."

This last speech emanated from the lips of an elderly woman of enormous corpulency, and whose immense bloated face, watery eyes, husky voice, and general appearance too well betokened a life of habitual intemperance. She was lolling in a half-tipsy state in a large arm-chair; and the constable, in a whisper to the two noblemen, made them aware that she was the mistress of the den. The younger daughter, — whose appearance so much resembled the elder's that it requires no special description, —was seated next to the mother; and a dozen ragged, dirty, squalid-looking half-naked boys and girls were placed round a rickety old table, on which were bottles, jugs, quart-pots, pipes, cigars, tobacco, and cards. The ages of these children averaged from nine to sixteen: vice was indelibly stamped upon their countenance. A few had been naturally good-looking — but it required an almost microscopic eye to discern the traces thereof beneath the grime that masked the features of some, and the bold traits of habitual profligacy, intemperance, and dissipation which characterized others. The room was miserably furnished: the walls and ceiling were so completely blackened with smoke and dirt that the place looked like a sweep's abode; and the crazy boards that formed the floor, sinking beneath the feet, produced gurgling, plashy, slushy sounds, as if the planks rested upon a bed of thick slime and mud. Such indeed, to a certain extent, was the case: for in consequence of bad drainage — or perhaps the absence of all drainage — whatsoever—the refuse-water could not flow off and collected in the foundations of the house. The atmosphere was sickly in odour and stifling in heat —it was actually pestilential;—and after merely glancing around this room, the two noblemen were constrained to step back into the passage with the intention of leaving the loathsome den at once.

"You'd better see it all, my lords, now that you're here," whispered the constable.

"This scene is nothing to what you'll find up-stairs. Come, Biddy—lead the way and show the light."

"The woman accordingly conducted the visitors into a back room, the aspect of which was as horrible as that of the other. Here there was a fire; and a dozen boys and girls, of the same description as the first lot seen by the visitors, were engaged some in drinking and card-playing, and others in cooking things for their supper. Sausage, bits of fish, tripe, and slices of liver were all frying together in one enormous pan: while in a pot—or rather cauldron—cow-heels, more tripe, trotters, chitterlings, and other abominations purchased from the cat's meat shop, were stewing together. The boys and girls hushed their uproarious mirth (as had been the case in the other room) on the appearance of the two noblemen with the constable. They recognized the last-mentioned individual; and some of them began to what they termed "chaff him"—giving utterance to horrible imprecations and disgusting obscenities as glibly and as unconcernedly as if these phrases formed necessary integral parts of the English language. We cannot of course sully our pages therewith: but we may record the sense and tendency of some of the characteristic observation.

"Hullo, you Peeler! what d'ye come here for?" demanded a girl of about sixteen, and who though half-naked was utterly unabashed. "If you're looking after me you'll catch a rum'un: for I'm blowed if I don't spile that precious face of your'n."

"He dont't come for me," said a youth as thin as a skeleton, horribly squalid, and clothed in rags, so that his frightful emaciation was painfully visible: "cos why I've took never a fogle all day——have I though? that's all! No—I'm sniggered if I'm wanted this time."

"I'l tell'ee what, Peeler," said another boy, "if you've come to ax about my karricter I must refer you to the beak which sent me to the everlasting stepper six months ago. Oh! won't he speak a jolly good word for me—that's all!"

"Come, I say, you Polly," cried an urchin of nine, with a face like a monkey, and addressing the officer in a shrill voice, "it isn't me that's in trouble, be it now? You can't say as how I'm a cross-cove, though you chaps does swear to anything. Crikey, how them Pollies does swear——my eye!"

"Don't bully the poor man," observed another juvenile tatterdemalion, who was eating a baked potatoe; "he's a good feller in his way. Here, old chap — have some of this here murphy? It's deuced good, if the butter wasn't rank. Ah! you Pollies doesn't get sich nice things as we does. You are poor——you be – poor devils!"

"Tip us your mawley, Peeler," squeaked forth another urchin, with a shock of hair like a piece of a carriage mat; "and let's see that you're not nosing on us. Don't be afeard to come near me—I won't knock yer down, I won't."

"Kim aup, Peeler — what air ye arter here? Tell us, there's a good chap, and ve von't be too 'ard upon yer. But no lies, mind—no lies; or I'm blowed if I'll put aup vith it for one:"—and this was said by the smallest boy in the whole company.

"What'll you give me, you Bobby, you," cried a girl whose age certainly was not above ten, but who seemed amazingly sharp, "if I tell yer how much I got by filching yesterday and to-day. Nineteen ankerchers — seventeen purses—forty-two gold snuff-boxes—and a big lump of cheese."

At this sally of thieves' wit there was an uproarious outburst of laughter on the part of the whole juvenile crew, in the midst of which the visitors quitted the room. But as they ascended the dirty, rickety, narrow staircase, —still conducted by Biddy Burley,—the shouts of mirth from the back room appeared to follow them, until those sounds were lost in another tempest of uproar which emanated from the upper part of the house.

Biddy Burley conducted the two noblemen and the constable into the front room on the first floor: and there indeed a strange and revolting spectacle met the eye. The floor was strown with rotting rags as completely as a table is littered with straw or an uncleansed pig's-stye is ankle-deep in filth. There was not a vestige of furniture in the place. A solitary candle burnt in the chimney. The atmosphere was hot and stifling, as well as of the most fetid odour. It struck with a sickly taste to the tongue, and at once produced a nausea and heaving at the stomach. Those who have never visited such a place can form no idea of the loathsomeness of the heavy stagnant air: it seemed to be compounded solely of fetid breaths. The exhalations of putrid fever were nothing to it. And there, in that room, were crowded some fifteen or sixteen boys and girls, of the same gradation of ages and of the same stamp and description as those previously seen. Some few were stretched upon the mass of putrid rags, sleeping soundly despite the noise made by the others who were awake. These latter were romping and frolicking at the moment when the visitors entered: but they left off to stare at "the swell coves," and then to chaff the policeman. Thus was it that persons of both sexes were accustomed to her and huddle together in that vile den, each paying two pence a night for the accommodation.

A couple of minutes' survey of the disgusting scene was quite sufficient for Staunton and Saxondale. They experienced a horrible sickness at the stomach; and their very clothes appeared to creep upon them, as if alive with vermin. Biddy Burley offered to show them the rest of the house: but they were quite satisfied with what they had already seen; and Staunton having given her a guinea on his own account for her trouble, the visitors lost no time in issuing from the den.

"Widder Burley and her daughters," said the constable, as they proceeded along the street, "drives a roaring trade with them boys and gals. Why, would you believe it, my lords, she's got at least seventy or eighty of'em in that house of only six rooms! The whole place swarms with thieves as plentiful as vermin: and it's supported too by thieving. There isn't a morsel of food or a drop of drink that goes into that place, that's bought with honest money. Perhaps your lordships think that it's the only place of the sort? Well, I can tell you there's hundreds of such cribs in London: and *that* isn't even the worst. Down in the Whitechapel and over in the Mint, there is worse still. But now, if your lordships like, I will take you into a lodging house for grown-up people—tramps, thieves, beggars, and what not."

Lord Saxondale at first positively refused the constable's proposal: but Lord Harold, feeling some curiosity on the subject, accepted it, and succeeded in over-ruling his companion's scruples. They did accordingly visit a low lodging-house in the same neighbourhood: but we need not follow them throughout their investigation. A few particulars will suffice. The house was a large one, in the occupation of a ruffian-looking fellow, who had to pay a very high rent to the principal landlord; and in order to do this, he had to make the most of the premises. The original landlord had a dozen such houses, and rolled in his carriage. His tenants being so highly rented, could not afford, even if they felt inclined, to expend any money upon the improvement of the houses: consequently it was not altogether their fault if those dens were of the most loathsome and unwholesome description — with no drainage—no ventilation — and wretchedly supplied with water, which was also unfit to drink. But let us look inside the particular house which the two noblemen visited on the night in question. In every room the lodgers were crowded together. There was a sort of attempt at a distinction of beds, but there were no bedsteads—merely a number of dirty straw mattresses stretched upon the floor, each provided with one coarse horse-cloth coverlid. These were filthy to a degree, and swarming with vermin. The beds — if they deserved the denomination —had but an interval of about a foot between them; and what with being trodden down and therefore made to encroach even upon that limited space, and what with the coverlids spreading over or tossing about, being kicked on in consequence of the heat, the floor of every room appeared to be completely covered with this wretched bedding. Whole families — consisting for instance of father, mother, and two or three children — occupied one bed; grown up brothers and sisters slept together: fathers and daughters, mothers and sons—all adults — were similarly situated. But we can proceed no farther: the picture is too hideous to be dwelt upon. Those of our readers, however, who have never visited such frightful dens, may rest assured that none of their details are here exaggerated. Indeed, it would be impossible to find any terms sufficiently hyperbolic to transcend the stern reality of the abhorrent truths.

Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale liberally rewarded the policeman for having accompanied them in these visits: and they made the best of their way, the one to Jermyn Street, the other to Park Lane, to put off the raiment which they had on, and which appeared to cause the most unpleasant sensations. We need scarcely add that these clothes were never worn again, but were given to their valets to be got rid of according as they might think fit.

In our former works especially devoted to the description of the mysteries of London life, we have introduced our readers to low dens of the same description as these of which we have now been writing: but we do not consider that we are to be blamed on the score of repetition or supererogation. We purposely and with studied intent recall public attention again and again to the horrible abodes which poverty is compelled to seek, where vice lurks, and where crime conceals itself. For we boldly and unhesitatingly charge to the account of our legislators and rulers the existence of those sinks of abomination.

CHAPTER LIX.

ELIZABETH AND FRANK.

WE must now return to Lady Bess's pretty little cottage in the neighbourhood of Edmonton; and if we peep into the elegantly furnished parlour, one morning after breakfast, we shall behold the amazonian heroine and her brother Francis Paton seated together upon the sofa. Four or five days had elapsed since the youth received the terrible confirmation of Lady Saxondale's averment that his sister was a female highwayman. That during these few days Frank had been very ill, and had suffered much, mentally and bodily, a glance at his pale countenance would show. The colour had completely left his cheeks: he seemed drooping and languid, as if physical exertion were attended by pain: and it almost appeared as if the unfortunate young man experienced a thorough lassitude of life.

His sister, apparelled in the garb befitting her sex, also looked mournful: but with one arm thrown round her brother's neck, and one hand clasped in his own, she was doing her best to console and cheer him.

"Dearest Frank," she said, "it cuts me to the heart to behold you thus. If you do not endeavour to rally your spirits, I shall myself sink into such deep despondency and gloom as to be utterly incompetent for the final unravelling of this skein, so much of which is already disentangled."

"Elizabeth," answered Frank, fixing his large hazel eyes in deep melancholy upon his sister, "it grieves me—Oh! it grieves me, to be the cause of affliction to you. I am sure, when you think of the past, you must have already enough to make you sad——"

"That is a reproach, Frank," observed Lady Bess mildly but mournfully; "and after all my candour in telling you everything without the slightest reserve, I think might have spared it."

"Pardon me—forgive me, dearest Elizabeth!" cried Frank, flinging his arms round his sister's neck and embracing her affectionately. "I was indeed wrong to say what I did. Oh, no—I would not reproach you! And now tell me—do you forgive me?"

"It is not for you to ask pardon of me," was his sister's response. "You have never done anything to make you ashamed: whereas I—but I need not say more."

"No., dear sister—we must not dwell upon this topic. That it has caused me pain—great pain—cannot be denied: but for your sake I will endeavour to become cheerful.

"One word more, ere we take leave of the topic," said Lady Bess. "Suppose that when you encountered your sister so unexpectedly a few days back, you had discovered her a lost and abandoned creature in the true sense of woman's ruin, would you not have loathed her?—or if the natural affection of your generous heart had forbidden you to loathe her, yet would you not have been overwhelmed with even a greater amount of grief than you now experience for what I have done? Could you now embrace me as you have just embraced me? would you not feel as if there were pollution in my touch? And remember, Frank, that when woman's virtue is lost, it never can be restored! She may repent: but her chastity is gone for ever. How different is my case! What I have done, can be atoned for. Because, as I have already assured you—although I have been guilty of crimes, yet I have never stooped to frailty. Ah! sometimes it is better to be criminal than frail—at least with woman! I have robbed upon the highway: but I have never plied a loathsome traffic in the public street. Nay, more—although I have been married—yet," she added, while a blush suffused her cheeks and she bent down her looks in modest bashfulness, "I am a pure virgin."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Frank, now something like enthusiasm in his tone "I would sooner, my dearest sister, find that you have been what you *have* been, than that to which you allude, Yes—your misdeeds may be amply atoned for; but had you been *the other*, the loss of your honour would have been irreparable."

"And yet, my dear Frank, those were the only two alternatives between which I had to choose at the time," continued Lady Bess; speaknig in a low and tremulous voice. "I chose that evil career which had an issue of hope at the end, in preference to that other evil career which at its very threshold is marked by the abandonment of all hope. And now tell me, Frank—can you look upon me with love and affection? or must you ever feel that you blush for your sister?"

"No—after all you have said, I cannot blush for you," replied Frank, warmly. "I may regret and deplore: but there is no need to be ashamed in the one sense in which a brother has to be ashamed of a sister! A thousand times do I rejoice that you chose the alternatives of evil which may be remedied, instead of that other alternative which admits of no redemption."

Again did the youth embrace his sister affectionately: and then they sat for some minutes in silence.

"Frank no longer wore Lady Saxondale's livery. He was dressed in a genteel suit of plain clothes, and looked a perfect young gentleman. Indeed, if he and Lord Saxondale had stood side by side and a stranger had been asked which was the nobleman, Frank would have been pointed to. The paleness of his looks—the traces of care—and the lingering evidences of indisposition, rendered his appearance even more interesting than it was naturally wont to be; and if Juliana could have seen him now, fervid and impassioned would no doubt have been her longing to strain him to her bosom.

"Do you think that you are likely to receive any intelligence from Lord Everton's man-servant to-day ?" asked Frank, after a pause, and for the purpose of reviving the conversation in another strain from that ere now pursued.

"I hope so," replied Elizabeth. "I know that he calls every morning at the Hornsey post-office to inquire if there be any letters for him; and he has doubtless by this time received the note I forwarded yesterday, telling him that he must lose no time in discovering Lady Everton's abode."

"And then, shall we all three proceed thither together ?" asked Frank.

"Yes, my dear brother—without delay. Adolphus is naturally most anxious to embrace his mother: his heart yearns towards her;—and if we receive the desired intelligence to-day, we can set out to-morrow - supposing that her ladyship is really dwelling in some secluded part of Wales."

"Why not denominate her *our mother*?" asked Frank, perceiving that his sister spoke of the subject of their discourse as *her ladyship*.

"Because we have not the positive certainty that it is so," answered Lady Bess. "And moreover, because we have agreed together that we are for the present to say nothing on the subject to Adolphus; and therefore we must be cautious how we speak of Lady Everton, lest he should overhear us."

"But can there be any doubt ?" exclaimed Frank. "No—it is impossible !"

"If I mistake not, this morning's post," observed Lady Bess, "will bring us a letter that will go far to confirm our belief in the one sense, or else show us that we have been cherishing a delusion."

"From whom do you expect a letter ?"

"Have you forgotten what occurred the day before yesterday, in respect to the carrier-pigeons ?"

"Oh !" exclaimed Frank : "it is then from Miss Marshell that you expect a letter ?"

"Yes," replied Elizabeth. "Being all but convinced that Sir John Marston had deeply wronged both you and me, and that our mother's intentions had been flagrantly violated by him, I wrote those words to Kate Marshall which I showed you, not merely in the hope of being able to serve the Marquis of Villebelle but likewise as a test of this belief which we entertain."

"I understand," said Frank, "If Lady Everton be really our mother, the bare mention of her name to Sir John Marston's ear, must strike terror to his soul. Is not this your meaning ?"

"It is so" replied Elizabeth. "But here is the postman. Sit you still, Frank —you are too weak for any exertion. I will run to the door."

Lady Bess accordingly hastened to receive a packet which the postman delivered; and returning to her brother, she opened it. It was a letter from Kate Marshall, containing an enclosure from the Marquis of Villebelle. What Kate had written ran thus :—

Admiral's Head, Dover.

"Dearest Elizabeth,

"I did not think it worth while to despatch one of our usual messengers merely for the purpose of telling you that your talismanic words fully succeeded in producing the desired effect—because I know that according to the invaraible understanding subsisting between us, you would regard silence as a proof of success. The Marquis departed this morning with the beautiful young lady who is to become his wife. Last night, before he retired to his room, he gave me the enclosed letter, with strict injunctions that it was to be forwarded to you at once. I accordingly send it.

"We are all well, and sincerely hope that you are prosperous and thriving. I receeved a letter from a certain person the other day or shall I in plain terms say, from Ned Russell? He was with his ship at Barcelona, but will be home in a few weeks; and then, my dear Elizabeth, as there will be a wedding at the *Admirals' Head*, it will be impossible to dispense with your services as one of the bridemaids. This kindness will be claimed at your hands by your former school-companion and

"Ever affectionate friend,
"CATHERINE MARSHALL."

Lady Bess was in no particular hurry to open the Marquis of Villebelle's letter, as she naturally concluded that it merely contained an assurance of gratitude for the service she had rendered him. Therefore, ere she broke the seal of that letter, she explained to her brother that the Ned Russell alluded to was the individual to whom Kate was engaged to be married—that he was a very fine, handsome, dashing fellow, about thirty years of age—and in every respect well suited for a good looking, sprightly, gay and frank-hearted young woman as Kate was.

Lady Bess then proceeded to open the other letter: but as she read its contents, so singular an expression of mingled surprise, incredulity, and solemn awe, appeared upon her countenance, that Frank could not help leaning over her shoulder and scanning the letter also. With its contents however we need not at present engage the reader's attention: suffice it to say that they afforded food for a long and series conversation between the brother and sister.

This discourse was presently interrupted by the appearance of Adolphus, who now entered the room. A considerable change had taken place in him; and it was all for the better. Not only had his intellects made great progress towards the recovery of their proper equilibrium, but his physical respect had improved. He was still thin—but the painful appearance of emaciation no longer shocked the eye. A suitable toilet moreover constituted an advantageous auxiliary to this improvement in his looks; and it was not difficult to see that when thoroughly restored to health, he would be a handsome man. His eyes had already lost their vacant bewilderment of regard, and had regained a natural expression. They were dark, and fringed with thick and beautiful lashes. His hair was likewise dark, and curled naturally: his teeth were fine—and the outline of his features, if not completely regular, was at least attractive. He was tall—exceedingly slender, but of good proportions; and now that he was properly apparelled, his air was that of gentility—almost elegance.

It was with the affectionate manner which a brother would show towards a sister, that Adolphus bade Elizabeth Chandos "good morning;" and also with a friendly cordiality that he addressed Frank. At the same time, as the reader has perceived, he had not the remotest suspicion that they virtually and literally believed him to be their half brother: it was in the sincerest gratitude and esteem that he testified such an affectionate demeanour towards Lady Bess; and this feeling was naturally reflected towards her brother. Lady Bess told him that she expected to see Theodore Barclay in the course of the day with some certain intelligence as to the abode of Lady Everton. Adolphus was rejoiced at these tidings; and Lady Bess asked him whether he felt himself sufficiently recovered to undertake so long a journey as that into Wales, supposing Theodore's belief should prove correct, that Lady Everton was actually residing in some strict seclusion there? Adolphus assured her that he not only felt sufficiently restored to health for such a journey, but that the object for which it was to be undertaken would inspire him with a spirit enabling him to bear up against all fatigue.

While Lady Bess, Frank, and Adolphus were conversing together, they perceived from the window a young lady, neatly and tastefully attired, and leading a charming little boy by the hand, approach the cottage.

"It is Henrietta Leyden!" cried Elizabeth Chandos; and a sudden glow of delight appeared upon the countenance of Adolphus.

There was a knock at the door; and in a few moments Rosa introduced Henrietta and little Charley. At the first glance Miss Leyden recognized in Lady Bess her deliverer who had worn male apparel at the time she effected her rescue: but she did not as quickly perceive that Adolphus was that same miserable-looking object whom she had seen at Beech-Tree Lodge, and who was emancipated from captivity at the same time as herself.

"I thought you had forgotten us," said lady Bess, taking Henrietta's hand and bidding her welcome. "Do you not recognize our friend here?"

"Yes—now I do," responded Henrietta: and it was with a look as much as to imply her mingled surprise and pleasure at beholding such a remarkable improvement in his general appearance.

"Miss Leyden," said Adolphus, taking her hand, and gazing with a half respectful, half timid admiration upon her sweetly beautiful countenance,—"we were captives in the same place, and I hope that we shall be friends now that we are restored to liberty. Ah! mine is a strange-wild history, and you ought to know it. You cannot think how I have suffered!"—and he pressed his hand to his brow: for though his intellects had almost recovered their equilibrium, yet there were moments when they appeared to totter slightly as if about to fall back into confusion—but then again, with the elasticity of reviving vigour, did they regain the firmness of their position.

"Come with me, Henrietta," said Lady Bess, "for I have much to tell you, and we had better converse alone. This dear little boy is your brother? He shall remain with *my* brother, whom you see here—and also with our friend Adolphus."

Elizabeth Chandos accordingly conducted Henrietta into another room; and there she proceeded to inform her who Adolphus really was, and wherefore he had been kept for so many years in captivity. Henrietta was naturally surprised on learning that it was the real and true Lord Everton with whom accident had thus made her acquainted; and if anything were wanting to augment her indignation against the old profligate who had usurped the title, it was this tale of abominable iniquity towards his nephew which she now heard. Lady Bess likewise explained to her how it was that Adolphus had found his way to her chamber at Beech Tree Lodge on those occasions when his ghastly appearance so much frightened her; and she wound up her narrative by the intimation that in a very few days there could be no doubt that Adolphus would be enabled to stand before the world as the real Lord Everton.

Henrietta was rejoiced to hear that the cause of right and justice would thus be made to triumph over that of usurpation and wrong; and she remarked upon the extraordinary change for the better had taken place in the young nobleman's looks.

"You may have perceived," said Lady Bess, "that his reason has nearly established itself firmly upon its seat again, but that there are moments when it quails and totters with a transient feebleness. However, his progress towards a complete restoration to health and intellect is highly satisfactory, and exceeds even the most sanguine hopes that at the commencement I dared form. But now, Miss Leydon, let us speak of yourself. In the first place I have to thank you for complying with my request, that no publicity might be given to the incidents which rendered us acquainted."

"It would indeed have been ungrateful on my part to have disregarded your injunctions," responded Henrietta. "You may even think that I have been guilty of ingratitude, as it is, for suffering so many days to elapse ere I called to renew my sense of the boundless obligation under which I lie towards you."

"Perhaps," said Lady Bess, slowly and with a significant look, "you had some hesitation in coming hither after all you saw on the night of your deliverance?—or perhaps your relations and friends may have counselled you against renewing your acquaintance with me?"

"Mrs. Chandos," said Henrietta, with a tone and look of warm effusion, "you wrong me—I can assure you that you wrong me. Candidly do I confess that the *one* incident of that night—an incident to which I need not more particularly allude—has troubled me much: but I have endeavoured to reason myself into the belief that although you suffered that proceeding to take place, you were no participator in its fruits. Besides, when I thought of the evident superiority of your looks, your manners, your language, I could not suffer myself to remain in the belief that——But I need not be explicit——And now that I behold you in this attire, and that I contemplate the honest frankness of your countenance——No, no—I cannot believe that——"

"And you are right," said Lady Bess: "you must believe nothing injurious with respect to me. There is some little mystery as to my motive in assuming male apparel the other day: but you will not ask me for explanation. It is my secret".

"And not for worlds would I seek to penetrate it," responded Henrietta. "I was about to tell you that I was not very explicit in the account I gave to my mother—and to a good kind friend whom heaven has sent us—relative to the transactions of the other night, At the same time you must understand that it was but *one* incident which I thus suppressed——"

"I thank you, dear Miss Leyden," exclaimed Lady Bess, "for this delicacy and generosity on your part. But do not let me suffer in your opinion, even by the existence of a doubt in your mind as to the particular incident to which you allude. Can you not comprehend that I stood in the position of a general who can only induce his army to assail a fortified town on the express condition that if successful in taking it, the booty shall be their own? You saw that I permitted those men whom I enlisted in the enterprise, to help themselves to whatsoever was in the room where we found you: but I consented not to a general sack and plunder. Now you understand the position in which I was placed: and if I had been over nice, both you and Adolphus would be captives there still."

"I am glad that you have given me all these assurances," exclaimed Henrietta, completely deceived by the sophistry of Lady Bess, whose hand she took and pressed warmly. "As I forbore to touch upon that particular incident when narrating the particulars of my escape to my mother and our friend, there was of course no objection raised to my paying you a visit this day. Indeed, were not my mother as invalid, she would have come personally to thank you; and if I myself have not been sooner, it was because that dear mother's illness, so cruelly aggravated by my unaccountable disappearance, has required all my attention. A little while back we were poor—very, very poor—and dwelling in a mean garret: but now, through the kindness of a gentleman named Gunthorpe, we are in comfortable circumstances and in a healthy abode. Mr. Gunthorpe has taken for us a sweet little residence on Stamford Hill——'

"Ah! you are therefore at no greet distance from my cottage?" exclaimed Lady Bess.

"It is a but a mere walk," responded Henrietta; "and as my mother was somewhat better this morning, I resolved to lose not another day in visiting you, accompanied by my little brother. Through the aid of Mr. Gunthorpe I am going to open a seminary so soon as my mother is restored to health. Oh! you know not what a kind benevolent gentleman is this Mr. Gunthorpe of whom I am speaking. He will not let us utter a word of thanks for all he does, and is so hasty and impulsive in his proceedings. Whatever he decides upon is done at once; and he appears to be immensely rich. I can assure you, Mrs. Chandos, that he is somewhat anxious to see you after the account I gave him of my deliverance from Beech-Tree Lodge."

"It is probably that I shall set off into Wales to morrow or next day—perhaps even this very afternoon," said Lady Bess: "but on my return I will communicate with you."

At this moment the door opened, and Francis Paton, making his appearance, said to his sister, "I wish to say one word to you before Miss Leyden takes her departure."

Lady Bess begged Henrietta to excuse her for a few moments; and wondering what her brother could have to say, followed him into a little back room, where he carefully shut the door before he explained himself.

"What is the meaning of all this mystery, Frank?" asked Lady Bess,

"Just now," responded Frank, "Adolphus suddenly drew me towards the window; and speaking in a low voice, so that the little boy might not overhear what passed, he said, 'There is something in my mind that I can keep secret no longer. I love that sweet beautiful Henrietta Leydon more than I can tell you. I love your sister as if she were *my* sister; but I love Henrietta with a different feeling. The other day I could not understand it: but now I can. For heaven's sake go and whisper a few words in your sister's ear and beseech her to ascertain from Henrietta whether she loves any one, or is under an engagement of marriage. I dare say, Frank, you will think this very strange, and perhaps very improper on my part: but I cannot help it.'—It was thus that Adolphus spoke to me."

"I am not at all astonished that he should have thus spoken," said Lady Bess. "I knew that he loved Henrietta; and poor fellow! he is a mere child in many respects. His captivity has robbed him of so many years of life's experience: he is therefore the creature of impulses—his sentiments and feelings are in a purely natural state, unwarped and unbiassed by worldly or selfish considerations. I see no harm in allowing this attachment of his to take its course, provided that Henrietta herself is disengaged;

for she is evidently a most amiable and artless girl, and no doubt of the highest respectability. Return you to Adolphus, and tell him that his wishes shall be complied with."

Frank accordingly went back to the room where Adolphus was left with little Charley, while Lady Bess returned to Henrietta. Resuming her seat, she took the young girl by the hand; and looking earnestly in her countenance, said, "I am going to speak to you upon a very serious subject. I wish to put a strange question—and I hope you will believe from the outset that it is from no motive of impertinent curiosity. Indeed, I am incapable of such a motive."

"But this question?" said Henrietta, naturally surprised at being thus seriously addressed.

"Tell me—are your affections engaged? or is your heart free?"

Oh!" cried Henrietta, with a blush of maiden modesty upon her cheeks, "this is indeed a question little expected! But I can answer frankly at once," she continued with a smile: "my heart is altogether free."

"In that case," resumed Lady Bess, her looks showing her satisfaction at Henrietta's answer, "I may at once explain to you my object in putting so strange an inquiry. Instead of keeping a school, Henrietta, you might, if you will, become Lady Everton."

The young maiden was overwhelmed with surprise at this announcement: the colour went and came in rapid transition upon her cheeks. She scarcely knew what to think or what to say. The prospect was brilliant and dazzling; and as it at once suggested ideas of wealth and independence—comfort for her mother, and a happy career for her brother—she felt her brain swim with the intoxication of bliss. But suddenly recurred to her the recollection that she had been an opera-dancer; and in that circumstance she beheld a death-blow to the hope so suddenly and unexpectedly excited in her mind. Lady Bess, watching her countenance earnestly, observed a cloud succeed the glow of animation which had at first overspread those delicately beautiful features; and she said, "Tell me all that is passing in your mind, Henrietta: for on so important a subject there must be no reserve."

"It was natural," responded the young damsel in a tremulous voice, "that I should for a moment feel bewildered as it were with the dazzling brightness of such a prospect: but no—it cannot be! Not for an instant would I prove unworthy of the generous confidence which the true and legitimate Lord Everton has demonstrated towards me. Mrs. Chandos, I have been a dancer in the ballet at the Opera!"

Lady Bess gave no immediate reply, but still gazed earnestly on Henrietta's countenance. Innocence and candour were there; and the blush that suffused her cheeks was not that of conscious shame. The amazonian lady knew full well by her own experience that female chastity may pass through many ordeals and issue thence unscathed: she knew also that woman's virtue may exist under circumstances by no means propitious to its wholesome vitality; and as she still gazed upon the sweetly pensive and softly interesting countenance of Henrietta Leyden, she could read as if through a transparent medium the guileless purity of the young girl's soul.

"It was necessity," she said, at length breaking silence, "which compelled you to appear at the Opera?"

"It was—the direst necessity!" answered Henrietta, tears trickling down her cheeks at the recollection of past calamities. "But you yourself have had sufficient proof that if I had chosen to stray from the path of virtue, I might have been surrounded with luxuries and riches. For what other purpose was I borne to Beech-Tree Lodge and held captive there?"

"No argument is required to convince me, my dear Henrietta, that you are fully worthy of becoming the wife of Adolphus. But on *this* occasion it were better, perhaps, that you should not meet again. You have a mother to consult—and he also will perhaps soon be restored to a parent whose wishes he may have to study. It is sufficient that I have ascertained from your lips the freedom of your heart. I will fetch your little brother to you."

"Yes—your advice is most prudent," said Henrietta, "and shall be followed." She then named the exact place of her abode, adding,—"Perhaps in a short time you will communicate with me?"

"Immediately on our return from the journey which I believe we are about to undertake: or perhaps I may even write to you from the place whither we are going. But tell me, Henrietta—do you think you can love Adolphus?"

"All the circumstances under which we met, and those which surrounded him" replied the damsel, with the most ingenuous frankness, "have naturally inspired me with a considerable degree of interest on his behalf. During the interval which has elapsed since the night of our deliverance, I have thought of him with feelings of the deepest sympathy: and now to find myself the object of his affection, is so flattering to me in all respects that—— But wherefore should I say more?"—and she bent down her blushing countenance.

"I understand you Henrietta," said Elizabeth Chandos. "You feel that you *can* love him—and that is sufficient. Fear not for a moment that the incident of your life to which you have alluded, will stand as a barrier in the way of your happiness. The love which Adolphus experiences for you, is the purest effluence of the heart's natural feelings; and such a love is generosity itself. I will explain to him the particulars of your interview; and I can conscientiously promise that his unsophisticated love will receive no shock from the revelation that necessity compelled you to earn your bread on the stage."

Henrietta Leydon expressed her gratitude for all the kind words that Lady Bess thus spoke; and taking an affectionate leave of her, she departed from the cottage with her little brother Charley.

Lady Bess had no difficulty in making Adolphus comprehend that it was more prudent for Henrietta thus to depart without seeing him again on the present occasion, as the young damsel would require leisure to compose her feelings after an announcement of such importance made so unexpectedly. Adolphus was docile as a child; and it was sufficient for him to be assured that no circumstances which could be at present foreseen, appeared to bar the confirmation of his hopes in respect to Henrietta.

At a later hour on that same day Theodore Barclay made his appearance; and Lady Bess saw him alone.

"Lord Everton," he said, in allusion to the old usurper whom he still called by that title from habit, "continues very ill, and is confined to his bed. Without being able to speak positive, but only judging from circumstances, it seems to me that he and Bellamy, as well as Mrs. Martin, are still so bewildered they know not what to do: but I overheard Bellamy say to the woman something about *it's being impossible that he could prove his identity.*"

"Meaning of course the rightful Lord Everton?" said Lady Bess. "But to the main point have you succeeded in discovering the place of Lady Everton's residence?"

"I have not," replied Theodore Barclay.

"Ah, this is provoking!" ejaculated Lady Bess, with a look of disappointment. "Have you no clue?"

"Yes: but not a very satisfactory one. To tell you the truth, I opened a writing desk where I knew that my old master kept some private papers, thinking that I should be sure to gain thence the information I wanted. But all I could discover was a letter from some solicitors in Parliament Street stating that they had duly made a remittance to Lady Everton, but without saying where she was".

"This is at least a step gained!" cried Lady Bess, "And who are these solicitors?"

"I wrote down their names and address," responded Barclay, as he produced a slip of paper.

"Marlow and Malton—eh?" said Lady Bess, as she glanced at the names: and it struck Theodore that a smile of arch mockery, most delightfully mischievous, flitted over her handsome countenance. "This will do," she continued: "depend upon it I will succeed in discovering the truth. You have not dropped a single incautious word at Beech-Tree Lodge that may excite suspicion of your being in correspondence with me?"

"I think I am rather too shrewd for that," returned Theodore. "No, no: I see at present on which side my bread is buttered; and I shall stick firm and faithful to you, ma'am, and the interest you have in hand."

"You will act wisely, Theodore. Continue to observe all that passes at Beech-Tree Lodge. But by the bye, you had better call again to-morrow afternoon, as I shall see these lawyers in the morning—and then I can tell you whether I purpose leaving home for a short time, and where letters will find me: for it is important that you should write if anything occurs to render such correspondence necessary."

Theodore faithfully promised to

obey Lady Bess's instructions in all things, and then took his departure. It was a sad disappointment to Adolphus and Frank when they learnt that the footman had not succeeded after all in discovering Lady Everton's place of abode : but Elizabeth Chandos bade them not be down-hearted, as she had full faith in her own ingenuity to obtain the desired information from Messrs. Marlow and Malton. Frank, knowing what had occurred between his sister and those gentlemen, looked both alarmed and surprised on hearing that she would now have something more to do with them, but when they were alone together, she succeeded in reassuring him entirely upon the subject.

CHAPTER LX.

MARLOW AND MALTON.

On the following day, at about eleven o'clock, the scene which we now purpose to describe took place at the offices of Messrs. Marlow and Malton in Parliament Street, Westminster. These two gentlemen were seated together in their own private room, which was large and handsomely furnished. One entire side was fitted with book-shelves from floor to ceiling, containing a collection of the most useful and valuable volumes connected with that Dœdalion maze of intricacy—the English law. There were Digests of the laws relating to particular matters—Commentaries upon those Digests—and Commentaries on the Commentaries of the Digests—and then the Digests of the Commentaries themselves. There were books of the common law and books of the statutes; and although the collection numbered at least five hundred volumes, their subjects embraced but some few sections of British legal procedure. A glance at that library could not fail to be followed by the wondering idea on the part of any intelligent man, that a civilized and enlightened people should possess such a jumble of laws and statutes, instead of one simple code that might be contained in a single volume. But this same intelligent and observing man whom we are supposing to make such a remark, would *not* wonder that there should indeed be emple food for the whole army of legal sharks, harpies and cormorants whom these crude, unintelligible, contradictory legislative absurdities have called into being and let loose upon society.

Another side of the spacious apartment which we are describing, was also arranged with shelves; but on these were long arrays of japanned tin boxes, distinguished by the names of the particular clients whose valuable papers required such safe custody. The lawyers were seated at a very large table, with a writing desk on either side, so that they faced each other; and the table itself was covered with bundles of papers tied round with red tape and bearing the usual endorsements in a large bold hand.

This private room was approached through the clerks' office, where seven or eight of these individuals divided their time between the papers on their desk and the sandwiches inside it. Opening from their Office were other rooms—one belonging to the managing clerk, another to the cashier and a third to some other official in the establishment : for, as stated in an earlier chapter, Messrs. Marlow and Malton carried on a very extensive business.

We must however return into the private room where these gentlemen were seated : but we should observe that there was still an inner room, leading out of their own, and which was termed "the parlour"—that being the *sanctum* where they received very aristocratic visitors, or else where one of the partners might transact business with some client should the other partner be simultaneously engaged in a like manner. But at the moment when we thus peep in upon them, they were alone together, discoursing upon their affairs. Presently some one knocked at the door communicating from the outer office ; and upon being bidden to enter, a clerk made his appearance. Advancing towards the table, he laid a card upon Mr. Marlow's desk, saying, "This lady, sir, requests an immediate interview."

"Mrs. Chandos!" ejaculated Marlow, bounding upon his seat, " Was there ever such——But no matter. How shall we act, Malton?"

"See her," was his more sedate partner's response.

"So we will," cried Marlow : then turning to the clerk, he said, "Show the lady in."

The young man disappeared ; and

Mr. Malton said, "Now don't act as if you were so over positive about that identity. You might have been mistaken you know——"

"Mistaken! Pooh—nonsense! Have I not eyes? and must I not believe them? But hush! here she comes."

The door again opened; and Mrs. Chandos—or rather Lady Bess, bearing that name and wearing the costume best befitting her sex—made her appearance. She was very elegantly apparelled: and with her veil thrown back, looked even handsomer than when Mr. Marlow had seen her at Dover at the *Admiral's Head.* The garb which she wore became her splendid shape to the utmost advantage, and though her features might be pronounced by rigid criticism to be somewhat coarse, yet it was impossible to deny that she was a very fine creature. Her hair in its raven richness, set off the high and noble forehead; the large dark eyes, so bright and so unfathomable, gave a wondrous animation to her countenance:—and as she entered, her moist luscious lips, parting in a mischievous smile which she could not possibly subdue, revealed those unblemished teeth of ivory whiteness.

Observing this smile, Mr. Marlow, who had at first looked grave and severe, could not help relaxing from that mood; and then, being suddenly seized with one of those jocular humours which are inspired by the remembrance of ludicrous circumstances, he threw himself back in his chair and burst out into a hearty laugh. Mr. Malton caught the infection—but far more slightly; and the self-styled Mrs. Chandos gave way to such a joyous fit of merriment, that the flute-like tones of her musical laugh must have reached the ears of the clerks in their own office, and made them wonder what hilarious client had just been introduced to the presence of their employers.

"Pray sit down, ma'am," said Mr. Marlow, feeling that it would be almost impossible to resume his severity of look after this virtual abandonment of rancour for the past. Have I really the honour of addressing the Mrs. Chandos of Dover?"

"Really that honour—if an honour it be," she answered, her gaiety having by this time subsided into a smile of roguish archness, which made her look most wickedly handsome.

"Well, I must confess that I do not know exactly how to receive you," continued the elder partner: "for in my own mind the conviction is still strong——"

"But you have received me with a laugh," interrupted Lady Bess. "Never mind what your conviction may be. I have come to talk upon a business matter—and I beg that the Dover scene may be put out of the question—at least for the present."

"Well, we will try to lose sight of it if we can," ejaculated Mr. Marlow: "but I confess it's difficult enough. And now, what about this business? I hope you do not want me to meet you on the high road to Tottenham somewhat late at night?"

"I will joke with you as long as ever you please," replied Lady Bess: "only when you are really inclined to be serious, perhaps you will let me know."

"Come, let us be serious," said the more sedate Mr. Malton.

"I am quite serious now," exclaimed the elder partner. "Mrs. Chandos, we will put aside the past for a few minutes if you please; and you may continue at once."

"So much the better," observed Lady Bess: and then she added with a smile, "I am sure on my part there is no rancour on account of the Dover affair."

"On your part indeed?" ejaculated Marlow. "No—I should think not. All the trouble and annoyance were on our's. There was I cutting down to Dover, while my partner here rushed off to Liverpool——"

"But I thought," interrupted Mr. Malton, "that we were to forget the past, while this lady spoke to us of the present."

"Yes, yes," said Marlow. "I am sure I do not want to be hard upon the lady, let her be who she may and call herself what she likes. But perhaps," he added with a lurking sneer," she has come with the honourable intention of paying our costs——I mean the cost incurred in racing and chasing, one of us to Dover and the other to Liverpool."

"Gentlemen," said Lady Bess, now assuming a severe look, "you are carrying your joke a little too far."

"By heaven! it was you who carried the joke too far," ejaculated Marlow: and he took up an ivory paper-cutter and tossed it petulantly half across the table.

"Come, come, Marlow, do be quiet,"

said Mr. Malton; "and let us see what Mr. Chandos wants with us."

Mr. Marlow threw himself back in his chair, as if resigning himself to the penitence of keeping silent on a subject which so much excited him; and he waved his hand to his partner, as much as to say, "Well, you must manage this business whatever it may be; for I see that I cannot help touching on the other affair."

"Now, ma'am," said the more sedate lawyer of the two. "I am quite prepared to hear what you may have to say."

"I must commence by observing," said the visitress, "that I have the honour of the acquaintance of Lady Everton."

"Was it made at night upon the highway?" asked Mr. Marlow.

"Hush, hush!" cried Malton deprecatingly. "Do let us get on, if it's only to save our own valuable time. Well, ma'am," he continued, turning towards lady Bess, "and so you have the honour of the acquaintance of Lady Everton. What then?"

"You recently made her ladyship a remittance of money to her present place of abode——"

"That is correct," said Mr. Malton. "Be so kind as to proceed."

"Are you not aware that in consequence of one of yourselves, or else one of your clerks, writing the address wrong, your letter of advice was some time in reaching Lady Everton, and that it caused her a great deal of trouble?" — and as Lady Bess thus spoke, it was with so much apparent sincerity of voice and demeanour that it utterly defied suspicion as to the point she was driving at.

"Spelt wrong?" cried Mr. Marlow, springing up from his chair. "No: I will be hanged if it was: for I wrote the address myself—and it's rather too bad to come and tell me that I don't know yet how to spell a name that I have written over and over again every three months for these many years past:" — and thus speaking, he resumed his seat.

"I really do not see wherefore there should be so much excitement upon the point," said Lady Bess, in a tone of gentle rebuke. "I am not here to waste your time in mere trifles. It is by the written request of Lady Everton that I have taken the liberty of calling, for the simple purpose of asking you to be more accurate in future in writing the address of letters intended for her ladyship."

"And pray how the deuce would you have it written?" exclaimed Marlow: then taking a sheet of paper, he pushed it over to that end of the table near which Lady Bess was seated, adding, "Be so good as to show me how you write it, since I must go to school again."

"Or rather," replied the heroine, "do you write it, and I will at once point out where you are wrong and how you transpose the letters."

"Very well," said Marlow, "But excuse me for observing that there is a court of appeal even from your learned decision, Mrs. Chandos; and when you have pronounced judgment we will look into the *Gazetteer*."

While thus speaking, Marlow dipped his pen into the ink with an excited, irritable manner, and then wrote down something upon the paper before him.

"Now," he cried, show me where is the error. I know it is a jaw-breaking name to pronounce: but as for the spelling of it, there can be no mistake."

"We shall see," said Lady Bess: and rising from her seat with a certain fluttering of the heart, she bent over the senior partner's shoulder and looked at what he had written.

The address was *Rhavadergwy, Radnorshire.*

"And that is *not* correct!" she at once exclaimed, by way of sustaining the stratagem to prevent her motives from being suspected. "It should be *Rhavawyderg*."

"Stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated Marlow, quite in a pet; and seizing up the *Gazetteer* that stood amongst other books of ready reference upon the table, he tossed over the pages until he reached the one that he sought: then pointing to the name in the book, he cried triumphantly, "Who is right? and who is wrong?"

"Well, I must confess that *you* are right," said Lady Bess, pretending to look profoundly astonished. "I wonder that Lady Everton could have made such a mistake."

"And I wonder," ejaculated Marlow, "that you should not have taken the trouble to look in a map before you came rushing down here to give us a lesson in the orthography of Welsh names."

"I must sincerely apologise for the intrusion," said the lady: and with a graceful salutation she quitted room.

"Well, this is the [most extraordinary thing," said Marlow, "that ever I knew. Is it possible that her object was merely this?"

"She could not have any other that I can see," replied Mr. Malton.

Half-an-hour after this incident the door again opened, and a clerk announced "Lord Saxondale."

The young nobleman lounged into the apartment with an air of dissipated languor, partly real and partly assumed; and nodding familiarly to the two lawyers, he flung himself upon the chair which Lady Bess had so recently occupied.

"We expected your lordship yesterday," said Mr. Marlow, with a somewhat grave countenance; "and I remained here on purpose, although I had important business elsewhere."

"Very sorry, but couldn't come," replied Saxondale flippantly. "Up late the night before—champagne breakfast in the morning—and all that sort of thing:"—and here he gave a terrific yawn.

"And I should think that your lordship was up late last night too?" said Marlow drily.

"Yes—up late every night, for that matter. Who the deuce can go and bury himself in bed before two or three in the morning——unless——"

"You may spare any addition to your remark," interrupted Marlow, perceiving that it would have been some flippant indecency. "And now about this list of debts of your's? Lord Petersfield has agreed that they shall be paid: and her ladyship your mother has expressed a similar desire. Mr. Malton and I, having talked the thing over, do not feel disposed to put a negative upon it: but we wish some little explanation about a few of the items, because we are of opinion that a compromise may be effected with the parties in some instances."

"Well, what explanations do you want? I have not so much time to spare: for I have got to meet a man in half-an-hour——"

"Meet whom?" demanded Marlow, somewhat sharply.

"Only Staunton," was the response.

"My opinion is that Lord Harold Staunton whom you speak of so familiarly, has done you a world of mischief; and I think, Lord Saxondale, that if you were to see a little less of him, the better. I do not say that you can cut him altogether, being engaged as you are to his lordship's sister——"

"Now pray don't preach a sermon," interrupted Saxondale, affecting an air of fatigue. "If you wish me to hear one, I will go with you and attend Dr. Dronewell at St. George's, Hanover Square, and if *he* don't send us all to sleep, may I be hanged if I know who will."

"Well about these debts then," cried Marlow, tossing his head and pursing up his mouth, as much as to imply that there was nothing to be done with such a being as Edmund. "I see here one Musters, represented as holding promissory notes for four thousand pounds. Pray how much have you received in hard cash out of this?"

"Oh! I had the value safe enough," replied Saxondale; "and I don't want any compromise made with him, because he was recommended to me by a young lady of my acquaintance, and it wouldn't look well if it came to her ears that it was a mere dividend affair and not a regular settlement. She would cut me dead if she thought it was a fifteen shilling-in-the-pound business."

"And pray who is this exceedingly fastidious young lady?"

"Ah! that's tellings," responded Saxondale.

"A mistress, I presume?" cried Marlow. "That is the way to devour your substance. Look at those tin-boxes. Half of them contain the title-deeds of noblemen's estates, or else mortgage-bonds and so forth; and I'll be bound to say that Woman was at the bottom of all the extravagances of which they are the proofs. But come, Lord Saxondale, you must give us the explanations we require; or we will put our negative upon the settlement altogether. I ask you therefore, how much money in hard cash did you receive from this Musters for the four thousand pounds of promissory notes that he holds? Do be candid; for we shall find it all out."

"Well then, I had three thousand pounds," replied Saxondale.

"Three thousand in hard cash. And what else?"

"A hundred pounds in wine-warrants,"

"What have you done with them?"

"The wine was so bad it wasn't drinkable; and so I sold the warrants for twenty pounds,"

"To whom did you sell them?"

"To old Musters himself,"

"Ah! that's just what I thought," ejaculated Marlow, "The wine never went out of the Docks at all, I suppose?"

"Never. He produced a bottle as a sample; but the first glass was enough."

"He's a very honest man to sell you things at one moment for a hundred pounds, and buy them back the next for twenty. But what else did you get from him?"

"Four hundred pounds in Debentures of the Carribbee Island Gold Mining and Pearl Diving Association."

"And what did you do with them?"

"Old Musters told me that they were capital securities, almost at a premium; and so I went to a stock-broker and asked him to buy them. I don't know much about these things—and I was rather astonished when he told me that were not worth eighteen-pence apiece."

"What did you do with them?" demanded Mr. Marlow.

"I did not like to offend old Musters by taking them back, so I put them into the fire."

"The only place they were fit for," observed Marlow. "Well, we have still yet five hundred pounds to account for——"

"Oh! that was for interest, bonus, and so on," exclaimed Saxondale; "and I don't think it was out of the way."

"In plain terms, this Musters has charged you a thousand pounds, *minus* twenty for the wine, for the loan of three thousand for about eight or nine months. Now, we see here," continued Marlow, referring to the list of debts, "items for a carriage and horses—an immense bill at a wine-merchant's—plate and jewellery at a goldsmith's—and a fearful account at a milliner's. What are all these?"

"For the lady who introduced me to Musters," answered Saxondale.

"She took care to be well rewarded for her trouble, at all events. But how happens it that in less than one year you have run up a tailor's bill for thirteen hundred pounds? That would give you a hundred and thirty suits of clothes at ten pounds each."

"Ah! but isn't all for clothes," responded Saxondale: "there's about seven hundred of it for cash lent."

"Oh! then I suppose this six hundred pounds at a cigar-shop in the Quadrant, is not at all for cigars? If so, one would think you must have kept a whole regiment in tobacco for the last six months. Come, how much of this is money borrowed?"

"About two-thirds," replied Edmund. "But hav'n't you pretty nearly got explanations enough?"

"No — not quite. What are we to understand by this memorandum which states you to be answerable for a friend to the amount of three thousand pounds to Israel Issacs of Chancery Lane?"

"Oh! that the Sherlff's Officer, you know——"

"We know very well who he is: but who is the friend for whom you are answerable?"

"Why, Staunton, to be sure. And now for heaven's sake have done, or I shall never get away."

"Stop, stop: don't be in a hurry! This business is more serious than any other you can have in hand. There is such a host of tradesmen in the list that it would seem as if all the expenses of Saxondale House fell upon your shoulders; and many of them too are her ladyship's tradesmen. I recognize their names. How can you owe them money like this?"

"Well, if you must know, Lord Petersfield and you have kept me so uncommon short that I have been obliged to run in here and there and borrow an occasional cool hundred, or so, wherever it was handiest."

"Then, I should say that almost every shopkeeper in Regent Street, and Bond Street, and in Piccadilly, have been found handy by your lordship at times?"

"Uncommonly handy," returned Saxondale. "But have you done *now?*"

"I think, Mr. Malton," said Marlow, appealing to his partner, "that we need not enter much deeper into these affairs?"

"The list is indeed much worse than we anticipated," observed Mr. Malton; "but for this once I suppose it must be settled." The attorneys then intimated to Saxondale the amount of the addition to be made to his monthly allowance until he should come of age; and after another lecturing, which he listened to with sundry yawns and other evidences of impatience, he was at length permitted to take his leave.

We cannot however immediately divert the reader's notice from the office of Messrs. Marlow and Malton: for soon after Edmund Saxondale's departure, the door of the private room was again opened, and a clerk entered to announce that a gentleman giving the name of Mr. Gunthorpe requested an interview. Marlow desired him to be at once admitted: and our old friend bustled into the presence of the attorneys, with his hat in one hand, his cane in the other, and his scratch wig turned the least thing awry by accident. Having taken a seat, he at once said, "I believe, gentlemen, that you are the attorneys of Lady Saxondale?"

"We have that honour," replied Mr. Marlow,

Then, gentlemen, I request that you will give me your very best attention," resumed Mr. Gunthorpe. "You doubtless read in the newspapers of a duel which recently took place between Lord Harold Staunton and a young gentleman of the name of Deveril. Now, in this Mr. Deveril I experience some degree of interest——"

"I think I once saw him," said Marlow, "at Lady Saxondale's house. Did he not teach the young ladies drawing, or painting, or something of the kind, until he so misconducted himself towards their mother?"

"Stop!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe: "that is the very point I have come about. He did *not* misconduct himself. It is altogether a base fabrication on Lady Saxondale's part——"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," exclaimed Marlow, "I cannot permit this language. Her ladyship is our client——"

"And that is the very reason why I have come to you. Mr. Deveril is perfectly incapable of such conduct as Lady Saxondale has represented. She has injured him in two ways—in a pecuniary sense by procuring his exclusion from the houses of her acquaintances, and in a moral sense by damaging his reputation. With regard to the former it is a mere nothing in comparison with the latter. Thank heaven, he is comfortably off through his own industry and other circumstances; and if he were not, my purse would be open to him. But to be injured in the point which is dearest to an honourable man—his character—this is the source of affliction as well as the wrong that is to be vindicated; and if there is justice in England, and it can be obtained for money, William Deveril shall have it."

"Do you mean to threaten her ladyship with an action on Mr. Deveril's account?" asked Marlow.

"Most decidedly," responded Gunthorpe. "It appears to be the only way of vindicating Mr. Deveril's fair fame. I call upon her ladyship; and she refused to make such amends as she ought. I would have allowed the matter to be settled as quietly as possible, so as to compromise her as little as might be: but she boldly stood out. Now, both Mr. Deveril and myself are still averse to taking extreme measures; and therefore I thought I would call and see if you, as Lady Saxondale's friends and legal advisers, would interfere to save her ladyship from the scandal of exposure in a law court."

"But what counter-allegation does Mr. Deveril make?" inquired Marlow.

"Mr. Deveril declares that her ladyship poured forth in his ears an avowal of love—that she acted towards him in a manner the most indecorous—and that plainly avowing marriage to be impossible, she offered to become his paramour."

"Mr. Gunthorpe," ejaculated Marlow, "it is impossible this discourse can continue. My partner and I have had the honour and pleasure of Lady Saxondale's acquaintance ever since her husband's death—that is, about nineteen years: and if we were asked to point out amongst the ladies of the Aristocracy one who by her exceeding rectitude of conduct, her unvarying prudence, her self-elevation above everything savouring of levity, much more above everything calculated to excite the breath of scandal, we should not hesitate to name Lady Saxondale."

"Appearances cannot always be trusted," observed Mr. Gunthorpe. "It is quite possible that Lady Saxondale may have conducted herself during a long series of years with the utmost propriety: but in this instance it is evident enough to me that she was beguiled by a strong infatuation into the grossest imprudence. I also have as high an opinion of William Deveril as you have of Lady Saxondale. I know that Deveril was incapable of bending an impure look upon Lady Saxondale—much more of daring to offer an insulting overture. It is absolutely incredible. Even before the duel, I was perfectly convinced of his innocence in this respect: but since the duel I have received what I consider to be the fullest corroboration. In a word, gentlemen, the night before that duel took place, he wrote several letters, amongst which there was one to me. I have since read it; and therein he confessed to me that he was deeply enamoured of a young lady; and being so enamoured—enamoured indeed almost to infatuation—it is not credible that he would have made tender overtures to Lady Saxondale."

"All this may be perfectly logical in your estimation, Mr. Gunthorpe: but we cannot see with your eyes. At the same time," continued Mr. Marlow, "I must thank you for coming to call upon us with a view to prevent the disagreeables of a lawsuit. It speaks well for yourself; and I am quite ready to confess that although we do not doubt the issue for a minute, we shoufd not like to see Lady Saxondale's name paraded before the country in such a manner. What is it that Mr. Deveril requires?"

"A written acknowledgment of the falsity of Lady Saxondale's accusation and this he pledges himself he will only exhibit in those quarters where he has reason to believe the calumny has been propagated. I should have called upon you ere this, had it not been for the duel which has stretched my poor young friend Deveril upon his bed: so that I lost all thought of everything except his danger. Now he is approaching convalescence, and it is time to adopt measures to clear his character.

"You are aware perhaps that Lady Saxondale has left town, and that she is plunged into the deepest grief on account of her youngest daughter Miss Constance Farefield—or rather I suppose," added Marlow, the "Marchioness of Villebelle, as she must be now that is to say, if the Marquis were really in a condition to take a second ——But no matter, Lady Saxondale, I was observing, has her troubles: her son is a source of annoyance to her: and the sudden death of a faithful old servant, which happened the other day, has likewise contributed to her sorrow. Now, I will appeal to you, Mr. Gunthorpe, whether you wiil increase her ladyship's vexations by assailing her character through the medium of a law-court?"

"Much as I regret the misfortunes of others, I cannot consent that their offences should be glossed over. Mr. Deveril's character must be vindicated. State how many days you require for reflection upon the subject, or to communicate with her ladyship, and the delay shall be granted. But if at the end of that interval nothing satisfactory is done, then I am determined that my attorney shall at once take the necessary steps on Mr. Deveril's behalf. And I warn you that we are not without evidence——"

But here Mr. Gunthorpe stopped short.

"We had better talk it over, Marlow," suggested Mr. Malton: "and therefore let us request Mr. Gunthorpe to suffer the matter to remain in abeyance for one week."

"With all my heart," responded the old gentleman: and making his bow, he forthwith took his departure.

CHAPTER LXI.

HUSBAND-HUNTING.

TURN we now again to Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire.

Lady Saxondale and Juliana were seated at breakfast a few days after their arrival, and if there were not a positive friendliness, there was at all events a less chilling reserve than there lately had been between them. As for love or affection, those bonds were completely broken, never to be united; and as for filial respect on the part of the young lady towards her mother, that was likewise a sentiment which could never have existence again. To suit their own purposes—and indeed to disarm each other of the malignant spite which, if given vent to, would work reciprocal mischief—they had agreed upon a sort of peace. The overtures had not proceeded from one more than from the other: but they had both felt that they could not possibly live longer upon such terms—a freezing silence when alone together, and the simulation of a friendly discourse in the presence of the domestics. They had both alike calculated the folly and danger of maintaining a rancorous enmity against each other; and they knew too much of one another's secrets not to feel that it was better to come to an understanding in respect to the future. Thus was it that on this particular morning, shortly after they met at the breakfast table, they looked at each other; and the glances they exchanged, showed them that each had come to the same resolution, and that so far as reconcilement was possible it ought to take place.

"I know what is passing in your mind," said Lady Saxondale.

"And you are entertaining precisely the same thoughts, mother," was the answer.

"You feel that we cannot go on thus?"

"It is precisely what you are feeling also."

"And you therefore think," said her ladyship, "that we had better come to an understanding?"

"My views in this respect," was Juliana's rejoinder, "are identical with your own."

"You mean to stipulate," said Lady Saxondale, "for perfect liberty to act as you choose, and to be free from maternal control?"

"And you on your part," said Juliana, "will pursue your own course after your own fashion?"

"Then whatever I may know of you, shall be the same as if not known at all."

"And your secret shall uot escape my lips. There shall be no prying into each other's affairs—no accusations, and therefore no recriminations."

"That is exactly what I should propose," responded the mother. "But if you would allow me to offer you my advice, Juliana, you would marry at the very first opportunity. Indeed, the sooner the better—for fear that your amour with Francis Paton should be followed by certain consequence."

"Such is my intention," returned Juliana; "and for particular reasons of my own, I shall endeavour to find either a very old, doting, but wealthy husband—or else some country squire, who has more money than brains, and will think too much of his horses and his hounds to devote any particular attention to the proceedings of his wife."

"You will scarcely find it difficult to pick up such a husband as this in Lincolnshire. There is Mr. Hawkshaw Hall—a fine, dashing country squire ——"

"Thank you for the hint, mother. I remember him well; he has known me since I was a girl. And by the bye, he is very intimate with the Denisons, where we are going to-night. You have told me what you would advise me to do," continued Juliana, after a pause, "and I on my part should counsel you to get that woman——what is her name?——Madge Somers, as they call her——out of the country as soon as you can."

"It is already done," responded Lady Saxondale. "The other morning, when she came to Park Lane, I gave her five hundred guineas, on condition that she would at once depart for America—with the promise that on her arrival in New York, if she wrote to let me know she was there, I would despatch her a like sum."

"You have acted prudently," observed Juliana. "I only hope that she has sailed. Doubtless she has plenty of money with her: for that was not the first sum you have given her?"

"No: I had previously given her money. Do you know what that woman's mania was? She told me. It was gambling."

"Gambling! a woman?" ejaculated Juliana, in surprise.

"Yes. From what she said, there is some low place in London frequented only by female gamesters—and she was one. She always lost, and yet could not abandon the habit. To gratify her propensity she lived in that hovel where you found her, and was always clothed in a sordid and wretched garb. But enough concerning the wretch. You and I have come to a certain understanding, and let us adhere to it."

"It is my intention." responded Juliana. "And now, since we appear to be growing a little more communicative than we have lately been, would you like to know what that letter contained which I received yesterday morning, re-directed from Park Lane?"

Lady Saxondale hesitated for a moment —and then said, "Yes."

"It was from Constance," replied Juliana. "She and the Marquis were married in Paris, and at once proceeded on their way to Madrid, where he has obtained a good diplomatic appointment."

Whether Lady Saxondale would have given any response to this information, we know not: for at the moment the door opened, and a domestic entered bearing a letter, which the postman had just brought over from Gainsborough. Her ladyship, at once recognizing the handwriting of Mr. Marlow, opened it: but she had not read many lines before a look of annoyance gathered upon her features. She however commanded her feelings, and quickly composed her countenance: then, having perused the letter, she folded it up and continued her breakfast. Juliana saw that it was something unpleasant which the epistle contained: but as her mother gave no explanation, she did not seek it—the understanding being that they were not to pry into each other's affairs.

After breakfast Lady Saxondale shut herself up in her own chamber, and pondered long and painfully upon Mr. Marlow's letter. It contained, as the reader has no doubt suspected, an account of Mr. Gunthorpe's visit: and the lawyer requested her ladyship to send him her instructions within a week. Lady Saxondale was one who seldom delayed in making up her mind how to act: but in this instance she could not resolve so speedily. She saw that the present dilemma was an awkward one: for she was terribly frightended lest Lord Harold Staunton, either through vengeance or remorse, should seek out Deveril and make him acquainted with all the circumstances which had impelled him into provoking the young artist to a duel. If armed with that evidence, Deveril could crush her in a court of justice: but without it, he could not well prove his case against her. She now regretted having made an enemy of Lord Harold Staunton, even though her honour must have been sacrificed in order to purchase his friendship. The result of Lady Saxondale's deliberation was a resolve to propitiate Lord Harold and ensure his silence. But inasmuch as she could not well invite an un-married young man on a visit by himself to Saxondale Castle, she resolved to send a pressing invitation to Lady Macdonald to pass a few weeks in Lincolnshire, and bring Lord Harold and Lady Florina with her. She accordingly wrote by that very day's post to this effect; and she likewise despatched a letter to Mr. Marlow, repelling with much virtuous indignation what she termed "the black calumnies invented by Deveril against her," but promised to give him farther instructions in a few days.

In the evening Lady Saxondale and Juliana, both elegantly dressed, and both looking grandly beautiful, entered the carriage, and were borne to the mansion of Mr. and Mrs. Denison, which was about two miles distant from the Castle. There was a dinner-party at the Denisons' on this occasion—to be followed by a ball, at which all the surrounding nobility and gentry, with their wives and daughters were to be present. The Denisons were one of the richest and belonged to one of the oldest families in Lincolnshire. The father and mother were advanced in life, and had several sons and daughters, nearly all of whom were married and settled in different parts of the country. They were of course all present on this occasion. Amongst the other guests was Squire Hawkshaw, whose name has been already mentioned, and whom we must now specially introduce to our readers.

He was a tall, well made man, about six-and-thirty years of age, and a good specimen of the modern class of "country gentleman," so far as his personal appearance went: for he had nothing of the coarse manners and roystering vulgarity of the squirearchy of the old school. He was however of a jovial disposition, honest and frank-hearted; with a countenance not positively handsome, but open and good-humoured, and impressing an observer with the conviction that he was a thoroughly straight-forward and well-meaning man. His features were large—his forehead very high—and he possessed a remarkably fine head of brown hair. His manners were good, but neither elegant nor polished: there was nothing vulgar in them, but at the same time they would scarcely have suited the exquisite fastidiousness of the West End of London. His laugh was too loud and merry for the delicate nerves of the mere female creatures of fashion: and yet such was its unalloyed good humour, that only such creatures could have wished it to be more subdued. He dressed well, but not with the extreme nicety of a lounger in Hyde Park or the other fashionable resorts of the metropolis; and he was certainly much more at home with male companions who could converse upon horses, and dogs, and field-sports generally, than at a whist-table as the partner of an old dowagar with turbaned head and pursed-up mouth.

Mr. George Hawkshaw was a very rich man. The Hall—as his residence was denominated—was one of the finest country-seats in Lincolnshire; and he maintained a numerous establishment of domestics.—How it was that he had not as yet married, no one exactly knew—unless it were, in general terms, that he was not a marrying man. Many a mother however could conscientiously lay her hand upon her heart and affirm that if one of her daughters had not become "Mrs. Hawkshaw of the Hall," it was for no want of manoeuvring on her part; and all the marriageable young ladies round about could with equal sincerity satisfy their consciences that they had done their best to ensure him in love's toils.

Such was the individual whom the Hon. Miss Juliana Farefield had selected in her own mind as her future husband. Juliana reasoned with herself that if the power of her charms and the influence of her fascinations had failed to procure her a husband in the metropolitan circle of fashion during the six years that had elapsed since she first came out at sixteen, they were by no means likely to experience failure when their artillery was played off against the heart of a country squire; and she felt proudly conscious of the fact that in all Lincolnshire there was not a young Lady of such splendid attractions as her own.

Indeed, never had Juliana appeared to greater advantage than on the evening of which we are writing. The ball-dress that she wore displayed the glowing magnificence of her charms—the superb bust and the arms bare almost to the shoulders. She had arranged her hair in massive bands, with a few tresses hanging down behind from the knot in which its chief luxuriance was gathered at the back of the well-shaped head, and a camelia set off its glossy darkness with a striking effect. The aim upon which she was bent imparted a heightened animation to her countenance; and her eyes shone with even more than their wonted fires. She had resolved to couquer—and that speedily too; and she was already flushed as it were with the foretaste of anticipated triumph.

Now, as the Hon. Miss Farefield was decidedly the female star of the assemblage at the Denison's, and as Mr. Hawkshah was the most important individual amongst the younger portion of the male guests, it was quite natural that he should give his arm to Juliana to escort her from the drawing-room to the dining-room; and he of course sat next to her at table. She put forth all the powers of her conversation to charm him: and this she did without the slightest betrayal of studied effort. Well knowing what his favourite topics were, she skillfully, but in a manner that seemed perfectly natural, turned the discourse thereon. She seemed to enter into the spirit of the exhilarating sports of the field—gave him to understand that she wished she lived altogether in the country—and was even astonished at the dexterity with which she acquitted herself when speaking of racing, and hunting, and steeple-chasing. Until this evening those topics were Juliana's utter aversion: she had fancied that every sporting character smelt of the stables, and was totally unfit for the roseate light and perfumed atmosphere of drawing-rooms. But now she appeared to enter with enthusiasm into all that pertained to the sporting world; and skilfully catching hints from the remarks which Mr. Hawkshaw himself made, she expanded them into lengthened disquisition of her own.

Her companion was evidently charmed. The more she talked, the deeper became his interest in her conversation; and presently he found himself gazing upon her with a rapture that he had never known in woman's presence before. New feelings appeared to be taking life in his heart; and as he contemplated her face and her form, the conviction gradually grew upon him that he had never beheld anything so beautiful as those features or so superbly symmetrical as that shape. When he looked at her aquiline profile he fancied that she appeared thus to the greatest advantage: but when she bent her looks upon him and he gazed on her full face, catching all the glorious power of her eyes, he thought that she was still more beautiful thus.

The dinner passed over—the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room—and the gentlemen remained to sit a little longer over their wine. For the first time in his life Mr. Hawkshah neither appeared to enjoy the wine nor to mingle in the discourse that was taking place around him. His thoughts, were all concentrated on the splendid creature who had charmed him during the hour of dinner, and who only so recently left his side. It seemed to him as if some new and hitherto unknown influence had been shed upon him: he longed for the summons to the drawing-room to arrive that he might once more have an opportunity of beholding and conversing with Miss Farefield, he wondered that when he had met her in society on the former occasions that she was in Lincolnshire, he had taken no more notice of her than of the other ladies of his acquaintance; and he could not help asking himself what all these feelings meant, and whether they constituted that love of which he had read in novels and of which he had so frequently heard persons speak? Mr. Denison and the other gentlemen at the table noticed his abstracted mood; and after several vain endeavours to rally him into his wonted joviality, they began dropping merry and good-natured hints to the effect that he must have lost his heart. Then, the confusion which he felt, and the gush of strange emotions that seemed to pour through his breast, sending a thrill along every fibre and through every vein, made him suspect that they had really touched upon the right chord.

At length the summons to coffee arrived; and by one of those sudden inconsistencies, or rather eccentricities which frequently mark the human character, Mr. Hawkshaw resolved that he would not throw himself in the way of Juliana again, lest his friends and acquaintances, should in reality have good reason to say that he was smitten with her. Perhaps too he wished to put his feelings to the test; and perhaps, also he was afraid of being actually ensnared into those matrimonial aspirations against which he had hitherto maintained his heart in such perfect inaccessibility. Therefore, on entering the drawing-room, which was spacious, and where by this time most of the guests who were invited to the ball (having arrived since dinner) were assembled, Mr. Hawkshaw lounged about amongst them, endeavouring to assume an easy unconstrained air: but as he stood conversing first with one acquaintance, then with another, he caught himself falling into fits of abstraction, and his eyes unconsciously wandering to where the Hon. Miss Farefield was seated amongst some ladies in another part of the room.

On her side, she perfectly well comprehended what was passing in Mr. Hawkshaw's mind. Without appearing to observe him, she nevertheless kept her eyes almost constantly fixed upon him from beneath the shade of the long dark fringes. She noticed his moods of abstraction—she beheld his looks wandering towards her—and she likewise perceived that every time he lounged about, he halted nearer and nearer to where she was seated. Thus she had no difficulty in penetrating the kind of struggle that was going on within him: and with a secret glow of triumph she felt the conviction that he was ensnared.

Presently the band, which had been procured from Lincoln to attend upon the occasion, struck up its swelling harmony as a signal for tha dancing to commence. A young nobleman, of high rank but wretchedly affected manners, advanced and requested the honour of Juliana's hand for the first quadrille: but well aware that Mr. Hawkshaw did not dance, she was about to refuse on the plea of headache—when it suddenly occurred to her that in the mazes of the dance she would be afforded an opportunity of displaying her fine form to its utmost advantage. Besides, if Hawkshaw were really smitten—as she had no doubt he was—it would pique his jealousy to behold her the companion of another, and would effectually bring him back to her side so soon as the dance should be over. She accordingly accepted the proposal, and stood up with her partner. The rapid glance which she threw towards Hawkshaw, at once showed her that he had been watching with a degree of interest which he could not altogether conceal, the result of a little dialogue between herself and the young nobleman who had invited her to dance; and she even observed that a look of annoyance appeared for a moment upon his features as she suffered her partner to lead her out.

When she had taken her place in the quadrille, she noticed that Mr. Hawkshaw remained standing to gaze upon the dancers; and she knew that it was for *her* he thus lingered. Never did Juliana float with a more graceful ease through the mazes of the dance: never did she display a more elegant lightness, mingled with a certain fashionable languor, than upon this occasion. Mr. Hawkshaw followed all her movements: he thought no longer of being ridiculed by his friends: he cared nothing about losing his heart—for indeed it was already lost. All the raptured he had experienced at the dinner-table were revived in his breast: he again felt as he had never felt before towards any being in female shape: he appeared to be hurried along by some strong current of feeling over which he had no power, and which might bear him whithersoever it chose, and he unable to resist.

"What a veway wemarkable fine day we have had, Mith Farefield," observed the young nobleman, during the first interval which afforded an opportunity for conversation.

"Quite delightful," responded Juliana.

"I went out widing thith mawaning about thwee o'clock—I thuppoth the common people would call it the afternoon—and it wath ekthtwemely pleathant thowarm—tho thunny—everwything tho gween—the tweeth tho thady—the wiver tho bwight—the birdth tho melodiouth—quite chawming, chawming."

"I have no doubt your lordship enjoyed your ride amazingly," observed Juliana, glancing towards the spot where Hawkshaw stood.

"I had my cweam-coloured horth—thuth a thplendid cweature—and he wath tho frithky, Mith Farefield. I thought he would wun over the common people in the woadth and fieldth—but he didn't. Wathn't it conthiderate on hith part? Ah! he'th thuth a thagathiouth animal. Do you wide, Mith Farefield?"

"Oh! yes—occasionally," was the response.

Chawming! chawming! I thall come and feth you thome mawning, if you are agweeable, to have a wun over the fieldth. I wode thwough a flock of geeth yethterday--and thuth a hithing, Mith Farefield, you never heard. I thought there wath a thouthhand thnaketh in the gwarth. It wath veway delithiouth—veway amuthing."

"It must have been," said Juliana.

In such edifying and delightful conversation as this did the intervals in the quadrille pass; and when it was over, Juliana, having promenaded two or three times round the room with her partner, was escorted by him back to her seat. He then made his bow and retired in the usual manner; and the next instant Mr. Hawakshaw was by her side.

"Why, where have you been?" she said, as if she had not been watching his countenance almost the whole time that she was meandering with the grace of a Venus and the dignity of a Diana through the dance. "I really thought you had taken your departure, or that you were still with the gentlemen in the dining-room."

These words came for a moment like a shock upon Mr. Hawkshaw: for they appeared to bespeak the most perfect indifference on the part of Juliana—an indifference, however, which he himself was so far from reciprocating! Juliana saw the effect of her words; and as it was no part of her intention to throw cold water upon the flame she had already excited, but merely to avoid having the appearance of laying herself out to ensnare him, she hastened to speak in other terms.

"At all events, I am glad you have found me out again," she said in a sort of confidential manner: "for I have been terribly fatigued by the dull platitudes of that silly young man who did me the honour of dancing with me; and I quite missed the lively discourse you and I had at the dinner table."

"I am rejoiced that you should feel yourself able to pay me such a compliment, Miss Farefield, said Mr. Hawkshaw, now full of rapture again, "But hither comes a gentleman who I know, means to ask you to dance:"—and he looked annoyed.

"Do *you* not dance?" inquired Juliana, already well aware that he did not.

"I am sorry to say," was the response, "that I am not sufficiently a lady's man."

"Well, after all," observed Juliana "it is very insipid: and to tell you the truth I care nothing about it."

At this moment the gentleman alluded to, advanced and solicited the honour of her hand in the next quadrille for which she might happen to be disengaged: but Miss Farefield with the most polished affability, assured the applicant that she did not mean to dance any more that evening. He accordingly bowed and retired.

"Give me your arm," she said to Mr. Hawkshaw, "and let us lounge into the card-room and see what is going on there."

Her companion was delighted; and as her hand was gently laid upon his arm, even that soft feather-like touch appeared to send an unknown thrill of ecstasy through his entire form. They proceeded to the card-room; and after loitering round the tables, retired to an inner apartment, where portfolios of prints lay open upon a table for the inspection of those who thought fit to lounge there. Juliana seated herself near a *console*, upon which her arm rested; and Hawkshaw remained standing by her side.

"It is quite delightful to get away from those heated rooms," said Juliana. "The air in the ball-heated room was quite oppressive.—or rather the absence of it was intolerable. You, Mr. Hawkshaw, who are always accustomed to the open air, with plenty of manly exercise,—I am almost astonished that *you* can endure the stifling atmosphere of apartments crowded with guests?"

"At all events, on the present occasion," he answered, in a low and somewhat hesitating voice, "I am overjoyed that I came hither this evening."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Juliana, affecting not to understand him. "And what particular inducement might you have had?"

"None to bring me hither—but perhaps some to make me remain later than I should otherwise have done:" and he now looked at her with a rapture which he could not conceal, and which she could not have mistaken, even had she been ten thousand times less experienced than she was.

"You are speaking in enigmas," she observed; but slightly inclining her head, she appeared to be playing with her fan.

At this moment three or four ladies from the card-room entered the apartment where the dialogue was taking place, and where it was so rapidly approaching an interesting crisis; and Juliana inwardly wished all imaginable evils on the heads of those who had thus interrupted the tete-a-tete. Outwardly, however, she did not display her vexation: the discourse became general with those who had just entered: and for the rest of the evening there was no farther opportunity for Miss Farefield to draw her admirer out.

On handing her hand Lady Saxondale to their carriage, Mr. Hawkshaw could not help pressing Juliana's hand; and on returning to his own abode, it struck him to be so gloomy, lonely, and cheerless, that he would have felt quite in desponding spirits, had not the image of the beautiful and brilliant Miss Farefield been present in his mind to cheer him.

CHAPTER LXII.

HAROLD STAUNTON.

TWO days afterwards a travelling-carriage drove up to the gate of Saxondale Castle, at about six o'clock in the evening; and Lady Macdonald, accompanied by Lord Harold Staunton and Lady Florina, alighted. They were welcomed with every appearance of cordiality by Lady Saxondale, and with a real sincereity by Juliana, who was exceedingly glad to have company at the Castle, which to her was dull enough, although Mr. Hawkshaw had called on each of the two mornings since the ball.

The quick eye of Lady Saxondale discovered at the first glance that Florina was unhappy and desponding in reality and the gaiety she assumed was only forced. Her ladyship therefore saw that Florina still pined on Deveril's account; and the pain of her fair young rival was a joy and a triumph to the heart of that vindictive and jealous woman. While alone with Lady Macdonald for a few moments before dinner, Lady Saxondale took the opportunity of inquiring, apparently in a casual and indifferent manner, if Mr. Deveril had made any further attempts to renew his acquaintance at Cavendish Square since the duel? and she was informed that he had not.

As a matter of course Lady Saxondale did not openly testify the spite which she cherished against Florina, but treated her with her wonted affability, and as her future daughter-in-law. For it was a source of infinite satisfaction to the vidictive lady to think that Florina, though attached to Deveril, should be sacrificed to her own profligate and worthless son Edmund.

But how had Lady Saxondale and Harold Staunton met? With the well-bred ease of persons in their station of life, and to all outward appearance if nothing unpleasant had ever occurred between them. But as Lady Saxondale had given him her hand on his arrival, the quick glances of deep meaning which they exchanged, showed that they thoroughly understood each other. On the one hand Harold Staunton comprehended that the circumstance of his being included in the invitation sent to his aunt and sister, was a proof that Lady Saxondale purposed to seek a reconciliation with him: and upon what terms could such reconciliation be effected, save and except on his own conditions? On the other hand, her ladyship perceived that he was quite willing to accept such reconciliation; and she had therefore no doubt of securing him entirely to her own interest.

The dinner was served up at about

seven o'clock; and when the dessert was over a little after eight, the party descended into the gardens to walk—for the evening was serenely beautiful. Lady Macdonald, fatigued with the day's travelling, soon returned into the Castle. Florina and Juliana kept together—while Lady Saxondale and Harold were thus left to themselves.

"Have I rightly understood your ladyship's kindness?" asked Staunton. gently placing her arm in his own, and leading her into a secluded avenue.

"Tell me what you understand by the term kindness," responded her ladyship, but with a smile which gave him every encouragement to proceed.

"I can only conclude that you would not have invited me hither," returned Harold, "unless you had made up your mind to atone for your past cruelty."

"Then it is not too late to offer such atonement?" said Lady Saxondale in a subdued voice.

"You must indeed have but a poor opinion of your own charms," rejoined Staunton, "if you imagine that they are not sufficient to subdue any rancour which I may have experienced in respect to what is past. I have been vindictive—terribly vindictive: and perhaps I even went too far in revealing everything to Edmund. But you must make allowances for the state of mind into which I was thrown. Consider what I had done for you. I had risked my own life—and I had nearly taken the life of another!"

"Would that you had effectually done so!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale bitterly.

"Have you still cause to be so vindicative against Deveril?" inquired Staunton. "Of course I have been at no loss to comprehend how he merited your anger. For a woman of such grand and magnificent beauty as you possess, and who condescended to fix her thoughts upon a miserable obscure artist,-for such a woman, I say, to experience a rebuff, was provoking indeed,"

"Do not allude to it any more," interrupted Lady Saxondale, impatiently: for she of course knew that it was useless to contradict the story to one who had every reason to understand it so thoroughly.

"Pardon me, dear Lady Saxondale," he replied, "if I dwell upon that topic for a moment; because I wish you to understand me well. I am not so insensate nor so vain as to believe that you are in love with me. I know very well that after having so recently set your mind upon Deveril, you can scarcely, even in the mere caprice of woman, snatch me up to supply his place. Therefore you have some motive in effecting a reconciliation with me. Do be candid; and explain what that motive is."

"You will not, then, give me credit for any kind of generous feelings towards you?" said Lady Saxondale: "but you think that even in this reconciliation I am selfish?"

"I cannot think that you entertain the slightest tenderness towards me—particularly after the dreadful scene which took place between us at your house. I can therefore only attribute your present conduct to one of two alternatives; and if it were only for curiosity's sake, I should like to know which it is."

"And those alternatives?" said Lady Saxondale inquiringly.

"The first is, that you seek a paramour, and have perhaps thought that you might as well take me into your favour in that light: and the second is, that you again wish to avail yourself of my services and do not regard the sacrifice you must make to obtain them."

"Now tell me, Lord Harold Staunton," said Lady Saxondale, stopping short and looking him full in the face,—"do you take me for a woman who is privately profligate, though before the world possessing an untarnished reputation?"

"I candidly confess that until quite recently I believed you to be a woman of the strictest prudence and propriety: but you yourself will allow that I have no great reason to flatter myself *now* that I shall be the first on whom you have bestowed your favours since your husband's death."

"On my soul, I swear to you, Harold," replied Lady Saxondale, "that you wrong me! It was a moment of weakness that led me to make overtures to Deveril and place mysalf in his power. Now, will you not believe me? I have no object in deceiving you: I do not even know that I have any particular object in thus vindicating myself up to the present time—unless it be that it is natural for a woman to take credit for as much virtue as she possesses, even in the presence of him to whom that virtue is about to be surrendered."

"I do believe you," responded

Staunton, in a voice which showed that he spoke with sincereity. "I am sufficiently acquainted with the world to be able to discover a demirep, no matter how thick may be the veil of hypocrisy that she wears; and having known you for some few years, I should certainly have detected you ere now. Yes—I do believe you; and therefore all the more welcome are you to me, dear Lady Saxondale!"

Thus speaking, he passed his arm round her waist; and in the shade of the avenue where they were walking, he embraced her. There was an interval of silence—and they proceeded slowly on, he still with his arm round her waist.

"But you have not told me what I can do for you," he at length resumed. "I am sure there is something in which you need my services."

"No—not at present, I can assure you," answered Lady Saxondale. "But tell me candidly—indeed, I beseech you to speak with the utmost sincerity—for it is important. Have you breathed to a soul, except Edmund, those circumstances that so much angered you against me? Pray do not deceive me. If you have, I shall forgive you, and must make the best of it. But if you have not, so much the better."

"Is it then so very important?" asked Lord Harold, slightly fencing with the question.

"Ah! I perceive that you have told some one?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale. "Now, Harold, listen to me. You must not leave me in the dark in this respect—you must not be afraid to confess the extent to which you have betrayed me. I am prepared to give myself up to you—I will even endeavour to love you—I feel that I already begin to like you; and if you devote yourself entirely to my interests, there is nothing I will not do to serve you. Therefore pray be candid; and to show you that I am inclined to put the fullest confidence in you, I will tell you presently wherefore I am so urgent in asking the question."

"I will therefore speak without reserve," said Harold. "Unfortunately," he continued, "you rendered me so bitterly vindicative against you, that I was not careful how I compromised you. There are two persons besides Edmund, to whom I have told everything."

"Two persons! Who are they?"

"One is Edmund's mistress—for I suppose that you know or suspect that he *has* a mistress; and the other is my faithful and devoted servant Alfred."

"Good God! this is most serious," murmured Lady Saxondale: and Staunton felt that she shuddered in the half embrace in which he still retained her as they walked slowly along.

"Why is it so serious?" he inquired.

"Because," she rejoined in a thick voice, but with bitter accents, "I am threatened with a lawsuit for the defamation of William Deveril's character; and that persevering, obstinate, dogged old man, Mr. Gunthorpe, is at the bottom of it all. It is doubtless his gold that will enable Deveril to carry on the process. If by any accident he should contrive to obtain witnesses to the whole or any portion of those transactions in which I so fatally involved myself, the result would be exposure—ruin—disgrace—dishonour—— Oh, I could not survive it!".

"And he has threatened you with an action?" said Harold, in a thoughtful mood: it was not however precisely upon what he had heard that he was thinking, but rather upon a subject which had gradually arisen in his mind within the last few minutes.

"He has threatened me with an action—or the alternative is that I sign a document to be circulated privately, denying the truth of the statement I had made to my friends concerning him. *That* I will never do. I would sooner risk the lawsuit. To sign the death-warrant of my own honour—to commit a suicidal act in respect to my own fame, were impossible!"—and Lady Saxondale spoke with the vehemence of a strong excitement.

"To be sure—you cannot do that." rejoined Harold. "A document to be circulated privately,—no, no—that will never do! As well the full exposure! Even if you lost the lawsuit, you might still persist that your cause was just, and that you were an injured woman: but if you once sign such a paper, all is over."

"That is exactly the view I take of it. Mr. Marlow has written to me. Of course he does not believe Deveril's story for a moment: but how could I ever look him in the face again if I were to write and tell him that I will sign an acknowledgment of my own guilt?"

"It is indeed most serious," rejoined Staunton. "Edmund's mistress is the only one to be feard: on my valet Alfred I can rely."

"You have not brought him down with you?" said Lady Saxondale quickly: "for I could not look him in the face——"

"No," answered Staunton. "My aunt; and Florina had to bring their two maids: and they would not consent that too many persons should encumber the carriage. Besides, from motives of delicacy—having unfortunately told Alfred the whole story in a fit of spleen and spite—I would not insist upon bringing him."

"But who is Edmund's mistress? I suspected that he had one, as he has been so constantly away from home of late——"

"She is an opera-dancer, known as Mademoiselle D'Alembert: her real name is Emily Archer. I can no doubt manage her. She is venal—and money will effectually silence her."

"But if she should have already gossiped upon the subject?" observed Lady Saxondale.

"I do not think it is likely," returned Staunton: "but of course I cannot take upon myself to answer for her discretion. You see that I do not buoy you up with vain hopes."

"No: it were foolish to do so. Will you return to London, upon some pretence, as soon as possible, and see her? You shall have cheques upon my bankers, that you may possess adequate means to satisfy her rapacity. Can you not pretend to-morrow that you have received some important letters from London requiring your prompt presence there?"

"Yes: leave it to me to manage," replied Staunton, still thoughtfully and almost abstractedly, as if while he was talking upon one subject he was revolving another in his mind; but Lady Saxondale was too much absorbed in the contemplation of her own perilous position, to notice his mood.

They continued to walk together for a few minutes longer until they heard the voices of Juliana and Florina at the extremity of the avenue; and then Harold quickly withdrew his arm from around the admirably modelled form of the superb Lady Saxondale.

The night passed, and on the following morning it happened that Harold did receive by the post a letter from a friend in London. It was delivered at the breakfast-table; and he immediately said that business of urgent importance in connection wtth some friend who had fallen into difficulties, required his speedy return to the metropolis; but he added that his absence would only last a few days, at the expiration of which time he should have the pleasure of joining the circle at Saxondale Castle again. His aunt bade him not be so foolish as to hurry off for the purpose of meddling with the affairs of friends in difficulties: but Staunton managed to convince her that it was absolutely necessary—and Lady Macdonald accordingly said little more upon the subject.

After breakfast Florina and Juliana went out together to walk in the garden; and Lady Macdonald sat herself down to read a new novel. Lady Saxondale whispered to Staunton to join her in a few minutes in the drawing-room; and thither he accordingly proceeded.

"My dear Harold," she said, "I thank you for this fulfilment of your promise. You know that I am now your's as much as woman can be, short of the marriage-ties. In surrendering myself to you this night past, I have descended for the first time from that pinnacle of honour which I have maintained since my husband's death nineteen years back! Oh! do you not confess that I deserve all you can do for me? But wherefore do you regard me in so singular a manner?"—and Lady Saxondale felt suddenly frightened at the looks of her paramour.

"It is time that we should have further explanations," was Staunton's answer, delivered with the tone of a man who felt that he was exercising an authority which could not be disputed.

"What mean you?" asked Lady Saxondale in a faint voice, and trembling all over; for she was smitten with a presentiment of evil.

"It will be your own fault," Staunton went on to say, "if we do not settle matters very amicably indeed. You have already said that you are mine as far as woman can be where the marriage vows have not been pronounced. Wherefore should those marriage vows not pass between us?"

Lady Saxondale was confounded and stricken speechless: she could scarcely believe her ears, and gazed in vacant bewilderment upon Lord Harold.

"Now, my dear Harriet," he resumed, "do not be childish—for we must talk seriously. You assured me last night, with a sincerity which I could not doubt, that your life had been pure and spotless, and that the moment of weakness in which you had given encouragement to Deveril was the *one* solitary instance: but as *that* led to no result, we may as well pass it over as nothing at all. Now, as I confess that it would not be very agreeable to me to marry a demirep and behold the laugh of scorn or the smile of superciliousness upon the lips of those who had previously been her paramours, I should not have thought of seeking you as a wife if it had not been for that solemn assurance. You have a handsome jointure of your owr; besides which, you have a good sum of ready money which you have saved. All this I know, of course, from Edmund. It is true that there is the disparity of a few years between your age and mine: but then I look older than I am, and you look much younger than you are; and therefore the match will not be so inconsistent after all. Besides, without any flattery, you are of a beauty so splendid that it seems to defy the ravages of time. Altogether, therefore, you will suit me as a wife better than any lady of my acquaintance—that is to say, better than any one who would be likely to have a man of no fortune such as I am."

"Is it possible that you are serious, Harold?" asked Lady Saxondale; who had listened in mute astonishment to this business-like and matter-of-fact speech, wherein however there was a certain pervasive under-current of patrician levity. "For if you be perpetrating a jest, it is cruel to joke with me under such circumstances."

"I never was more serious in my life," rejoined Harold: "and I am convinced that when you come to reflect, you will see that it is the best thing I can do for myself: inasmuch as that old uncle of mine Lord Eagledean does not seem at all inclined to die. I have had no letters and no remittances from him within the last two or three weeks, as I had expected; and at all events he could not possibly be offended with me for making such a match—he would regard it as a very excellent one."

"You must be mad, Harold!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, stamping her foot with impatience. "If you marry me, how can Edmund marry your sister?"

"Permit me to take care of myself and think of my sister afterwards. Do you not comprehend that if Edmund married Florina, it would prove of no pecuniary advantage to myself?—for I could not spunge upon them—whereas by marrying you, I secure to myself a fine position at once. Of course the affair would be broken off between Edmund and Florina; and we should soon find another eligible match for the former and a wealthy husband for the latter. Depend upon it, my dear Harriet, the scheme is admirable. I revolved it in my mind all the time I was conversing with you last evening: but I thought it better not to broach it until this morning—because I knew that in the interval you would become more truly mine than you were before. Now we are husband and wife in all except the marriage ceremony; and that may be solemnized in a very short time."

"Do you mean me to understand," asked Lady Saxondale, determined to come to the point at once, "that you are not making a mere proposal which I am at liberty to reject if I choose, but that you are dictating terms to which I am to submit?"

"Pray do not suffer aggravating language to pass between us," rejoined Lord Harold: "or you will compel me to speak more candidly still."

"Then speak candidly!" said her ladyship in a decisive tone.

"I will do so, since you require it. First of all, you enlisted me in your service to provoke Deveril to a duel, with the solemn understanding that if I did your bidding my reward was to be the highest that woman could bestow. To the best of my power I *did* your bidding. Heaven knows but too well that I did my best to lay Deveril dead upon the field,—and the crime is registered in that same heaven against me! When I sought you afterwards, how was I treated? I need not do more than remind you of all that passed between us. Now you have summoned me into your presence again—but not willingly, spontaneously, of your own accord. No: *again* do you require my services; and therefore did you send for me to become your instrument, your agent, and your tool. In all these matters you have shown yourself intensely selfish, Harriet: and I have nothing to thank you for. But do you suppose that I will consent to serve your purposes thus, as a mere convenience—a sort of hireling? 'Tis true that our connexion has become suddenly intimate: yet what guarantee have I that when your aim is answered and this dilemma of your's is settled, you will not cast me off with scorn again? At all events, as you have sought to make me serve your purposes, it is but a just retaliation that I should make you serve mine. It therefore suits me to claim you as my wife; and upon the written condition that you will become so, will I repair to London and completely baffle all your enemies.'"

"And you have maturely considered your plans?" said Lady Saxondale, over whose countenance suddenly passed that same dark and ominous expression which had on two or three occasions appeared thereon during her disputes with the deceased Mabel.

"Have I not spoken in the calm, quiet and deliberate style of a man who has well considered the project which he propounds?"—and as Harold gave utterance to these words, his own looks assumed the firmest decision: for he had construed that omnious expression on Lady Saxondale's face to be the mere effect of her angry feelings—he considered it indeed to be the passing cloud of an indignation to a tempestuous outburst of which she dared not give vent.

"Well then," said her ladyship, after a pause, "if you be so resolute, I have no alternative but to consent—inasmuch as I perceive you consider me to be so completely in your power——"

"You understand your position," interrupted Harold. "With a breath I could destroy you. My testimony on the side of Deveril in the law-suit which is threatened, would be damnatory: for remember, there is the masquerade-dress which your own son possessed himself of and which could be brought as a proof of my tale."

"Enough!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, for a moment biting her lip; and as she turned towards a table, on which there were waiting materials, that sinister expression, so darkly ominous, again appeared upon her countenance.

She seated herself at the table, and prepared to write: but suddenly throwing down the pen, she looked up and said, "Perhaps you had better draw up this promise of marriage in your own terms; and I will either copy the document, or sign the one you write."

"No: we need not take so much trouble as to make copies. You can write to my dictation. Are you ready?"

"I am. Proceed."

"Now then, begin thus:—'I the undersigned, Harriet Saxondale, feeling myself to be under the deepest obligations to Lord Harold Staunton, for delicate services which he has rendered me, and entertaining for that nobleman the sincerest love and affection, do hereby pledge myself to bestow upon him my hand in marriage at the expiration of one month from the present date; and inasmuch as I am aware that for my sake he is renouncing certain brilliant prospects of his own in a matrimonial point of view, I do hereby bind myself in the sum of *one hundred thousand pounds* to fufil this compact within or at the period above specified.'"

"Is that all?" asked Lady Saxondale, who had written with a firm hand to Staunton's dictation.

"I think that is an admirable document—terse and business-like—and with as few falsehoods in it as such a thing can possibly have. Your love and affection for me, and the brilliant matrimonial prospects which I renounce, are the only fictions; but they are beautiful ones of their kind. A lawyer would have crammed in a thousand falsehoods, and not one so romantic or touching."

"Cease this levity, Harold: for the carriage is already at the door."

"Pardon me: but I was in a lively mood. Now your pretty signature to that document—and I am off."

"It is completed," said Lady Saxondale. "And here is a cheque for a thousand guineas. Will that suffice for the purposes you have in hand?"

"If not, I can easily write for more," he responded: "but depend upon it, I do not wish to encroach more than I can help upon funds that will shortly be our's jointly. And now farewell, my dear Harriet."

He embraced Lady Saxondale, who suffered rather than returned his caress: and then having hastened to take leave of his aunt, Juliana, and Florina, Lord Harold Staunton leapt into the carriage and set off on his way back to London.

Immediately after he had taken his departure, Lady Saxondale sat down and penned a letter in a feigned hand. She then ordered her carriage, observing that she had to go to Gainsborough (the nearest town) in order to transact a little business with the banker there. As Juliana expected a call from Mr. Hawkshaw, she did not volunteer to accompany her mother; and as her ladyship's intended ride appeared to be of a purely business character, Florina also preferred remaining at the Castle. As for Lady Macdonald, she was too much fatigued with the long journey of the previous day to stir out; and thus Lady Saxondale's secret hope was fulfilled, that she would be enabled to visit Gainsborough alone. She had in reality no business of any kind to transact with the banker, but merely sought an opportunity of putting her letter with her own hand into the post, so that none of her dependants might perceive the address.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE POST-OFFICE.

WE must now direct the reader's attention to the interior of the Post-Office at Gainsborongh. It was the hour of noon; and two clerks were attending to the business of the establishment—one paying the money-orders—the other sorting the letters as they were dropped through the slit in the window. and also answering such inquiries as might be made at the little trap-door of the usual fashion adopted at country post-offices.

"I should think that Smith was sure to have come back last night," observed one of the clerks to the other.

"Yes: his holiday was up," responded the latter. "I wonder he hasn't shown himself already this morning. He has had a fortnight of it."

"Where did he go to?"

"To London, I fancy. He said that he should. My turn comes next; and I have made up my mind to visit London."

At this moment four or five letters were thrust one after the other through the slit; and one of them falling farther than the rest, fell into an inkstand which was standing upon the counter.

"Look here!" cried the clerk who attended to the sorting of the letters. "This comes, you see, of that rascally carpenter delaying to put up the letter-box again:"—and as he spoke he dried the soiled letter, upon a piece of blotting paper. "What a nuisance it is! He promised to put it up again last night: but this is the way he always serves us whenever he has to do a job here."

"It's too bad," observed the other clerk. "But here's Smith!" he suddenly exclaimed, looking through the aperture where he paid the money-orders.

Almost immediately afterwards a young man of about two-and-twenty entered the office and greeted his two colleagues: for he was one of the clerks in the establishment.

"So here I am again," he said, in a tone of regret that his holiday was over.

"Well, Smith, how have you enjoyed yourself?" inquired both his companions in a breath.

"Uncommonly," was the reply. "I only wish my holiday had been for a month instead of a fortnight. But by the bye, I understand Lady Saxondale has come back to the Castle?"

"She's been there for some days past," responded one of his comrades. "Is it true, though, that Miss Constance has eloped with a French Marquis?"

"Quite true," replied Smith. "It has caused such a sensation in London! They say she cut off just at the moment the carriage was at the door, and that she hired some old gipsy-woman to come up at the time and draw off her ladyship's attention. That's the rumour. But of course I don't know how true it is."

"Is it a good match for Miss Constance?"

"Or rather the Marchioness of Villebelle, as you must now call her," replied Smith. "Well, as for it's being a good match, I don't exactly know. I should think she might have done better—such a sweet beautiful creature as she is. The Marquis, I understand, is a very handsome man—quite young, that is to say, not above six or seven-and-twenty; and he has got a diplomatic situation. But that's all he has to depend upon."

"I'll be bound her ladyship is precious wild," exclaimed one of the clerks. "But when did you come back?"

"Last night. I travelled down with such a nice young fellow; and as we were alone together the whole way, we had quite an agreeable conversation. A more intelligent, amiable, but at the same time fine-spirited young gentleman, I don't think I ever met with. Perhaps you remember reading about a duel that took place the other day between a certain Lord Harold Staunton and a Mr. Deveril?"

"To be sure: and the report was that Deveril was killed—but it afterwards appeared that he was only dangerously wounded."

"Well," responded Smith, "this same Mr. Deveril it was with whom I travelled from London yesterday. He still looks pale and enfeebled, but is fast recovering of the severe injury he received."

"And what brings him down to Gainsborough?"

"I do not know: he did not volunteer any explanation, and therefore of course I did not question him."

"It happens that Lord Harold Staunton himself is at Saxondale Castle at this very time," observed one of the clerks: "or at all events a letter, directed to him there, was sent along to the castle this morning."

"This is strange," exclaimed Smith: "for Mr. Deveril appears anxious to see that fine old castle and its environs; and I promised that I would take him over there to-day. Indeed I expect him every moment: for it was noon that we appointed to meet. He is a total stranger at Gainsborough, and therefore availed himself of my proposal to escort him."

"Then you do not mean to attend to business to-day, I suppose?" observed one of his colleagues, laughing.

"No. Mind you, my leave of absence is not up until to-night."

At this moment some one inquired at the open trap-door of the money order clerk for Mr. Smith, who immediately recognizing the voice, exclaimed, "Ah! is it you, Mr. Deveril? Walk round, and we will take our departure in a few minutes."

Deveril accordingly entered the office, and was introduced by Mr. Smith to the other clerks. While they were conversing some one knocked at the trap-door of the window; and the particular clerk whose duty it was to answer questions, opened the said little door and gave whatsoever information was required. At the same instant a lady, hurriedly passing the post-office, dropped a letter through the hole; and by accident it shared the fate of a previous one by falling upon the inkstand.

"Well, *that is* odd!" exclaimed the clerk who had just answered the questions of the inquirer at the window. "Who do you think it was that just threw this letter in?—and, by Jove, it has fallen into the ink! Now isn't it too bad of that carpenter——"

"Who was it?" inquired Smith.

"Lady Saxondale herself."

Deveril started at this name: but the circumstance was not perceived by the other young men.

"Well, if this is not the most extraordinary thing I ever knew in my life," exclaimed the clerk who had recognized Lady Saxondale, and who having dried the blotch of ink upon the letter, was now examining the address.

"What's extraordinary?"

"Why, that her ladyship should have such a correspondent as this. Just read the address: it really doesn't sound at all aristocratic. *Mr. Solomon Patch, the Billy Goat, Agar Town, St. Pancras, London.*"

"Oh! very likely it's some old servant of her ladyship's," observed Smith carelessly; "or perhaps some one who has applied to her for charity. Who knows?"

"It looks uncommon like as if it was written in a feigned hand," observed the clerk who had picked it up from the inkstand: and he still continued to scrutinize it. "I think we know her ladyship's writing here pretty well; and if this isn't her's disguised in this manner, then I am a fool and an idiot. You see, Mr. Deveril," he continued, "we clerks in the post-office are so accustomed to all kinds of writing that we have great experience in such matters."

"Now," interrupted Smith, "I am sure Mr. Deveril does not want to hear a lecture upon this subject."

"The letter," continued the clerk, heedless of his colleague's interruption, "is not sealed, you see, with the usual armorial bearings, but with a plain stamp—the top of a pencil-case, I should say. I wonder her ladyship should have come to put it in the post herself."

"I am ready, Mr. Deveril and at your service," observed Smith: "for I am sure you must be getting tired of this long talk about nothing."

The young clerk of the post-office and William Deveril accordingly issued forth together, and proceeding to the hotel where the latter had taken up his quarters, they entered a vehicle which he had ordered to be got in readiness; and away they sped towards Saxondale Castle.

Deveril was more interested in the little incident which had just occurred, than his companion had fancied he could possibly be. Having a deeper insight into Lady Saxondale's character than either of the clerks in the post-office, he had even been more struck by the circumstance than the one who himself had appeared to think it extraordinary. He knew enough of London to be aware that Agar Town was a quarter of no very good repute; and the description which had recently appeared in the newspapers of the horrible murder in the barge, and which Deveril had happened to read at the time, had contained particular allusions to the notoriously bad characters who infested that place. It was therefore by no means surprising that Deveril should think it strange for Lady Saxondale to have a corresponent there; and the evidently furtive manner in which, with her own hand, she had borne the letter to the post,—as well as the disguised writing which the clerk had detected,—served to strengthen the young gentleman's suspicions that it was not altogether for a very correct or harmless purpose that a proud and titled lady, as fastidious as she was brilliant, should address a letter to an individual at the sign of the *Billy Goat* in Agar Town! But although Deveril mentioned not the subject of his thoughts to his companion Mr. Smith, he did not the less continue to ponder thereon.

On reaching the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle, William Deveril intimated to his new acquaintance that he did not wish to approach too near with the vehicle, so as to become the object of particular notice on the part of any of its inmates—but that he was merely desirous of viewing the edifice from a suitable distance, and of obtaining a glimpse of the grounds. Mr. Smith thought that he was somewhat too particular, as there could be no possible harm in strangers approaching close up to the building; and he moreover intimated that a fee to the servants would procure Deveril an inspection of the old tapestry-rooms, the chapel, and the other curiosities of the baronial edifice. But Deveril declined to avail himself of the suggestion, and appeared to be content with merely making the circuit of the castle and pleasure-grounds, except on that side where the river flowed by, washing the very foot of the walls, so that no one could pass that way.

Having thus far gratified his curiosity, as Mr. Smith was led to suppose, Deveril returned to the vehicle, accompanied by his new friend; and they retraced their way to Gainsborough. On the road they met Lady Saxondale's carriage returning from the town: but as her ladyship was reclining back at the time, Deveril both believed and hoped that she had not observed *him*, as he indeed had not caught a glimpse of *her* countenance.

Return we now to the castle, where in the meantime Mr. Hawkshaw had called; and inasmuch as Juliana had dropped a hint to Florina that he was paying his court to her, the young lady discreetly left the Hon. Miss Farefield a full opportunity of rambling alone with the Squire in the gardens. We need scarcely say that Juliana failed not to develop the requisite fascinations to rivet the shackles which she had already succeeded in throwing around Mr. Hawkshaw's heart. But although this gentleman was madly and enthusiastically in love with Juliana, he naturally conceived that a courtship of but a few days was not sufficient to warrant him in making a proposal. It is true that he had been acquainted with Miss Farefield for some years: indeed he had known her ever since she was a girl; but it was only from the date of the Denisons' party three or four days back, that he had been led to regard her with such admiration. Not being over well versed in love-matters, Mr. Hawkshaw had looked into a few novels to see how the heroes and heroines conducted their affairs of the heart; and the result was that he found himself rather bewildered how to act. For in one novel he perceived that the hero and heroine fell desparately in love with each other the instant they met — that in less than half-an-hour the former was on his knees at the feet of the latter—and that a passionate avowal of love was followed by the tenderest embraces: while in another romance the amorous swain sighed, and serenaded, and fluttered bashfully about the object of his love for a whole year without daring to confess his passion. The result however of Mr. Hawkshaw's researches in books, was to lead him to the conclusion that he should at least allow a month to elapse ere he proclaimed himself a suitor for Juliana's hand. The young lady, on her side, would fain have brought matters more precipitately to a crisis: but she was afraid of spoiling the whole affair by giving Mr. Hawkshaw too much encouragement; and she therefore acted wtth considerable art and skill suffering him to perceive that he was a special favourite, enrapturing him with her discourse, and successfully tightening the silken cords which bound him to her.

On lady Saxondale's return, Mr. Hawkshaw was invited to stay to dinner—an offer which he did not refuse; and when he departed in the evening, it was with so much intoxicating love in his soul that he began to ask himself whether he might not abridge the month's courtship, as alreadv laid down to be the rule of his conduct, into a fortnight?

On the following day, at about eleven in the forenoon, Mr. Hawkshaw called again, it having been agreed that he should escort Juliana for a ride across the country. The Hon. Miss Fairfield was a good equestrian—a circumstance which had no small weight in convincing Mr. Hawkshaw that she would make him a most excellent and suitable wife. Florina did not ride: Juliana accordingly went out alone with her admirer—that is to say, they were attended only by the groom. Lady Saxondale had letters to write—Lady Macdonald was somewhat indisposed and would not stir out—and thus Florina was thrown upon her own resources.

The young lady walked alone in the garden, wrapped up in a mournful reverie. She could not help thinking of William Deveril, notwithstanding all her efforts to banish his image from her mind. Nothing had come to her knowledge to alter her suspicions concerning him. She still had every reason to believe that he was living improperly with Angela Vivaldi, the opera-dancer; and the circumstance was still regarded by her as a corroboration of Lady Saxondale's story of his improper conduct. Her brother Harold, be it remembered, had never suspected her love for Deveril. At the time he encountered the young artist issuing from the garden-gate of his aunt's house in Cavendish Square, he knew not that there had been an interview between him and his sister—he fancied that Deveril was there merely for the purpose of seeking an opportunity of giving some explanations to Lady Macdonald in reference to the tale in circulation with regard to himself and Lady Saxondale. Therefore, Harold had no idea of Florina's love for Deveril; and Florina herself had not chosen to make voluntary confession thereof. Deeply, deeply had she been afflicted at the intelligence of the duel: most profound indeed was her sorrow, amounting almost to anguish, when it was first rumoured that Deveril had been killed—and killed too by her own brother. The misery she then felt, and the difficulty she had at the time in veiling her feelings from those around her, had shown her most unmistakably the real state of her heart,—to the effect that notwithstanding all she believed injurious to Deveril, his image still retained a too powerful hold upon her affections. And that it was so, had speedily received a farther corroboration in the sudden thrill of wild delight that she felt, blended for the moment even with a still wilder hope, when the intelligence had reached her that after all Deveril was not dead but merely wounded: and day after day had she watched the newspapers for a line indicative of his state. The duel having created a great sensation, in consequence of the aristocratic rank of one of the principals, the public journals had devoted more than ordinary attention to it,—the state of Mr. Deveril's health being daily chronicled until he was pronounced convalescent. By these means Florina had been duly informed in respect to the details of Deveril's progress towards recovery: and all the various phases of feeling through which she was thus led, convinced the lady that her happiness was more profoundly wrapped up in this love of her's than she could have supposed after the proofs she had received of Deveril's presumed infidelity.

We have thus, at a rapid glance filled up the interval in respect to the young lady's sentiments and feelings from the period of the duel until the time of which we are speaking; and now we behold her walking in the garden of Saxondale Castle, plunged into a profound and melancholy reverie. She saw that Mr. Hawkshaw was playing his court to Juliana; and she supposed that the latter loved him in return. This belief tended to sadden her even still more deeply: for she reflected that others were happy in their love, while she was miserable. With the utmost abhorrence did she look forward to her alliance with Edmund Saxondale; and though she had not the courage to tell her aunt that it was equivalent to a death-sentence thus to doom her to become the wife of such a being, she felt in her own heart that she never could consent to so tremendous a self-sacrifice. Oh! if Deveril had proved all she at one time hoped and fancied!—— but no: that dream of bliss was gone—that vision of happiness appeared to have fled for ever?

After wandering slowly and mournfully about the gardens for upwards of an hour, Florina seated herself in an arbour at the extremity of the avenue where Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold had roamed together the evening before. The sun was ascending towards its meridian—the heat out of the shade was stifling; but there, beneath that umbrageous canopy, a grateful freshness prevailed. The arbour was situated close by a line of a low palings which bounded the garden; and beyond stretched the wide park with its groves of stately trees and the deer frisking on their carpet of verdure. A silence, broken only by the warbling of the birds, reigned around; but Florina's soul, imbibed not solace nor peace from this serenity.

"Alas!" she said, giving audible expression to her thoughts, "mine is an unhappy destiny; and dismal indeed is the prospect of my life. Oh! for an instant what radiant happiness appeared to be shining around me: I felt as if I were experiencing the glories of another sphere. It is hard—too hard to have seen the storm-clouds gather suddenly over the brightness of that heaven, and all my hopes wither away as flowers in a pestilential blight. Ah, William Deveril! wherefore did I ever love thee? Wherefore was I doomed to experience thy treachery?

"No, Florina—no! By heaven, I am incapable of treachery!"

Such were the words, in the manly melody of a well known voice, that suddenly sounded upon her ears: and the next instant William Deveril was at her feet.

For a moment Florina sat astounded: then abruptly rising with a sudden recovery of all her maiden dignity, she was about to move away from the spot, when Deveril cried in a tone of anguished excitement, "Hear me, I beseech you — even if you condemn me afterwards! I am innocent — as there is an eternal God above us, I am innocent!"

Florina stood riveted to the spot. There was such a depth of sincerity in the youth's tone and looks—his fine black eyes shone, too, with an expression of such frankness and candour, that she felt it would be indeed hard not to hear him. And then again, there was the hope—the suddenly excited hope—that he might possibly be enabled to explain everything. Yes: and more than this too—there was the extraordinary beauty of his person, rendered delicately interesting by the effects of the duel; so that Florina had not the heart to tear herself away. She became pale and agitated, struggling to maintain a dignified reserve, yet experiencing a melting tenderness of the soul which increased every moment.

"You will hear me!" said Deveril, rising from the one knee on which he had bent; "and upon whatsoever terms we may part, I shall at least take away your good opinion with me!"

"Is this possible?" asked Florina, in a tremulous voice, while her heart fluttered like an imprisoned bird.

"Possible?" echoed Deveril, "I will give you proofs incontestible that the allegations of Lady Saxondale involved a detestable calumny."

"And those proofs?" said Florina, her looks proving how deeply she hoped that he might be enabled to fulfil his words.

"They are here!" he at once responded, drawing a document from his pocket. "Know you not that I have threatened Lady Saxondale with an action at law for the defamation of my character? You look surprised! But of course she would not tell you this. Ah! if you knew all the wickedness of that woman——"

"You will admit, Mr. Deveril," interrupted Florina, "that as I am now receiving the hospitality of Lady Saxondale, it ill becomes me to listen to any aspersions that may be thrown out against her without adequate proof."

"Ah! you saw that I hesitated to place this document in your hands!" he exclaimed, still retaining the paper: and he looked cruelly bewildered. "Take it," he said after a few moment's hesitation, "and read it if you will—but I warn you beforehand, that you will behold therein something that will shock you in respect to one who is nearly and closely connected with you."

"Heavens! what do you mean?"

cried Florina, "You frighten me. To whom do you allude?"

"Must I indeed tell you? Yes, yes: I see that I must. I cannot bear your suspicions any longer—I must clear up my own character at any risk—at any sacrifice! Florina prepare yourself to hear something terrible——"

"Oh! what new misfortune is in store for me?" murmured the poor girl, sinking back upon the seat whence she had risen. "Of whom is it that I am to hear such dread intelligence."

"Of your brother—of Lord Harold Staunton."

"My brother!"

"Yes. It was by the cruel and artful—aye, the satanic instigation of Lady Saxondale, that he provoked me to that duel——"

"William, if this be true," cried Florina, bursting into tears, "how immense is the reparation which you ought to receive from me!"

"It *is* true—it is, alas, too true!" responded Deveril. "That kind-hearted and benevolent gentleman, Mr. Gunthorpe, has succeeded in unravelling the whole skein of treachery. But by heaven, Florina, I entertain as little ill-will against your brother as it is possible for man to experience after such wrongs as mine! For *your* sake do I forgive him—for *your* sake will I clasp him by the hand——yes, and throw the veil of oblivion over what he has done! It must have been under the influence of an infatuation against which he could not wrestle, that he consented to become the instrument of that woman's vengeance. She sought my life—she wished me removed from her path—and she found in your brother a too ready agent!

"But these accusations are terrible, Mr. Deveril!" exclaimed Florina, cruelly bewildered.

"Read this!" he said, now placing the document in her hands. "It is the statement of an important witness who will appear against Lady Saxondale, should she push matters to extremes and drive me into the law-courts."

Florina mechanically took the paper—opened it—and commenced reading. It recited all the incidents in connexion with the masquerade, which are already known to the reader—how Lady Saxondale went thither in a particular dress to keep a previously given appointment with Lord Harold Staunton—how she had enlisted him in her service to provoke an enemy of her's to a duel, in which that enemy was to be slain—how Staunton had next morning received the note containing the name of *William Deveril*—how he had provoked Deveril to the duel—how Lady Saxondale had subsequently repudiated the whole proceeding, ignoring every detail—but how through Edmund's agency the masquerade dress which she had worn was disinterred from the plate-chest in her private apartments.

It was with a swimming of the brain, a whirl of the thoughts, and an augmenting confusion in all her ideas, that Florina perused this document. It was, too, with a kind of mechanical power that she read on to the end: and it was also with a mechanical tenacity that she held it in her hands. We may add that it was with an unaccountable fascination she kept her eyes upon a document which contained facts so damnatory to her own brother! Deveril watched her with the profoundest commiseration. Oh! it went to his heart's core to wound her gentle bosom thus: and there was a moment when he felt inclined to snatch the paper from her hands and bid her read no more. But it was the only means of vindicating himself; and painful as the proceeding was, he dared not arrest it.

"You may deem me cruel—even implacable, Lady Florina Staunton," he said, when he observed that she had finished, "in submitting this dreadful history to your notice: but what alternative had I? When last I saw you, it was on the same evening that your brother provoked me to the duel: you would not hear me — you retreated from the balcony in anger—and I felt that I was condemned unjustly."

"Ah, Mr. Deveril!" said Florina, the tears streaming down her cheeks: "you have indeed much cause to reproach my brother — and it is but too clear that Lady Saxondale is an infamous woman — that her tale against you was an odious calumny—and that she would not have stopped short even at the instigation of a murder to wreak her revenge! But, alas, I dare not say that I can give you back that love—that confidence——"

"Lady Florina Staunton," interrupted Deveril in a firm and dignified manner — while his tall slender form, modelled with so much Apollo-like grace and elegance, was drawn up to its full height, and his short upper lip expressed the hauteur of offended pride: "have the goodness to recollect that at the very outset of this interview, I said that on whatsoever terms we might part, I could not fail to bear away your good opinion. You honoured me—you flattered me—you made me happy, with an avowal of your love some short time back; and I believed that it was sincere. A tale of calumny naturally excited you against me. I have now vindicated myself—and your good opinion must be restored. But if, during the interval which has elapsed since you avowed your love and accepted the avowal of mine, you have repented of what perhaps after all was only a momentary weakness on your part—if, as I presume, the high-born Lady Florina Staunton in her calmer moments has shrunk from the idea of allying her fate with that of the humble and obscure artist from Italy—then be it so; but let there be candour in your speech! I give you back your vows—I give you back your pledges; and yet vindicated and innocent as I now stand before you, I have a right to claim them if I would. But no. More generous than you, Florina — more ready, too, to make any or every sacrifice for your sake—I will insist upon nothing that shall menace your happiness. No:" — and here his voice trembled —he murmured a few words which were inaudible, suffocated as they were by the strength of this emotions —and he was hurrying abruptly away.

"Mr. Deveril!" exclaimed Florina, suddenly wiping the tears from her eyes—for she had been weeping while he spoke: "we must not part thus. You have become the accuser—— But I also have something to say in justification of myself!"

Deveril turned back; and with an air of melancholy composure, in which there was a certain blending of his own offended dignity, he stood in front of Florina as she was seated upon the bench in the arbour.

"Had Lady Saxondale's story," she resumed, in a tremulous voice, "been the only cause of annoyance which I felt in respect to yourself, you would not have vainly sought an opportunity for explanation on that evening when you beheld me in the balcony of my aunt's house. Indeed, to give you a proof of my anxiety to seek such explanation—at the same time too," he added in accents more low and tremulous still, "to afford you a proof of the sincerity of that affection which I had avowed for you—I took a step which the world would have deemed most unmaidenly, and for the imprudence of which I was indeed but too severely punished! In the evening of the same day on which Lady Saxondale brought her calumny to my aunt's house, I stole forth, resolving to visit you at your own abode—to tell you all that I had heard, and to beseech an explanation——"

"Ah! you did this?" exclaimed Deveril, hope and joy suddenly lighting up his countenance. "Then you loved me—you really loved me? But wherefore did you not come? why did you turn back? what prevented you from carrying out your generous intention? Oh, what misery might have been spared to me!"

Florina gazed in astonishment upon the radiantly handsome countenance of William Deveril as he commenced this speech: but as she recollected all she heard and saw at his dwelling on that fatal night, she could not help again thinking that this was another evidence of his matchless effrontery—and she felt pained and shocked at the thought that it could be so.

"I did *not* turn back on that occasion, Mr. Deveril," she said in a cold calm voice. "I was *not* deterred by any circumstance, nor prevented by any accident from repairing to your abode near the Regent's Park. I entered the garden —the front door stood open—I heard what I will not repeat—and immediately after I saw what I will not allude to more. But it was all enough to convince me that while you were pretending that your heart was wholly mine——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Deveril, a light suddenly breaking in upon him: "I understand it all! Oh,—cruel and fatal mistake! Florina, you heard and saw——"

"Angela Vivaldi."

"My sister!"

A cry of wild delight thrilled from Florina's lips; and precipitating herself into Deveril's arms, she sobbed upon his breast, murmuring; "Pardon me—forgive me—dearest, dearest William!"

CHAPTER LXIV.

WILLIAM DEVERIL'S HISTORY

THE world has many delights—human feelings may experience many pleasures—the hearts of earth's denizens sometimes thrill with ineffable raptures. But what joy—Oh! what joy, can compare with that which attends upon the reconciliation of lovers? When the dark clouds of jealousy have gathered over the heaven of a young maiden's prospects, how sweet—Oh! how sweet, is it for that gentle heart of her's to find them dispelled all in a moment, and the sun of hope bursting forth to gild another day and illume another state of being, The world has no ecstacy superior to this.

Such was the delight experienced by Lady Florina Staunton at that announcement which, falling upon her ears like an angel-voice speaking to a soul in the depths of despair, cleared up the past mystery in a moment. And Deveril—was not he also happy? Again and again did he press that being of transcendent beauty in his arms—he covered her brow, her cheeks and her lips with kisses—then seating himself upon the bench, he placed her by his side and keeping both her hands locked in his own, he gazed upon her with the prolonged look of ineffable rapture.

Thus did they sit together, gazing upon each other in profound silence for many minutes. Their's was a joy—deep, elysian, ineffable—which appeared almost too holy for the interruption of words. But if their tongues were silent, most eloquently expressive were their looks: love shone in the deep clear blue of Florina's eyes and glowed upon the purity of her complexion;—and love too beamed in the dark orbs and tinted the cheeks of that youth of manly beauty. Yes—the cheeks which illness had left so pale, were now animated with the bright colours in which love paints the reflection of the heart's feelings: and perhaps that was the happiest moment of William Deveril's life.

"How cruel—how unjust I have been to you, dearest William!" murmured Florina, at length breaking silence. "Oh, if on that day when I saw you from the balcony at my aunt's house, I had only waited to hear the explanation you so kindly and generously came to give, what anguish—what misery might have been spared us both!"

"Do not reproach yourself now, my beloved Florina," returned Deveril, pressing her hand to his lips: "the happiness which I enjoy at this moment, is a recompense for the past. And I do not blame you—not for an instant do I blame you; Appearances were so much against me. But how could I possibly have suspected that *other* incident which has just been cleared up! Oh, it was indeed a proof of love on your part to seek me at my own dwelling."

"Heavens! when I think of all you have gone through," resumed Florina—and she still spoke in a murmuring tremulous voice, while the tears again streamed down her cheeks,—"it is enough to drive me mad. Stretched upon what was deemed your death-bed—believing that I no longer loved you—smarting under the calumnies which an infamous woman had spread concerning you——Oh! it was too much—it was too much, William—dear William! All the love I bear you, immense as it is, can scarcely prove an atonement—a recompense!"

"Again I beseech you, dearest Florina, not to torture yourself thus. Let us hope that happy days await us. In the depth of my own bitter sorrows, there were not wanting some consolations. My sister Angela—an angel in disposition as well as in name—was ever by my bedside; and that kind-hearted excellent friend, Mr. Gunthorpe, was unwearied in his attentions. You know him, Florina—you have seen him: and he has the highest opinion of you. He is acquainted with the secret of our love: and I know not whether it could be to soothe my wounded spirit, or whether it were that he had really some design of his own to be worked out,—but certain it is that with the tone of the fullest confidence he bade me to despair not—for you should yet be mine!"

"And I will," murmured Florina, the carnation again deepening upon her cheeks, and her beauteous eyes being modestly bent down; then as a sudden thought struck her, she looked up, and with a paroxysm, of indignation, exclaimed, "To be sacrificed to the son of that bold, bad woman, Lady Saxondale—no—never, never!"

"And Mr. Gunthorpe declares that you shall never be so sacrificed," rejoined William: "though what means he may have or hope to have, in throwing any influence into the scale, it is impossible for me to comprehend,"

"He is an intimate friend of my uncle the Marquis of Eagledean," observed Florina suggestively; "and perhaps he intends to invoke his lordship's interference.'

"It may be so," said Deveril. "It was in accordance with his counsel—and I need scarcely add with my own earnest desire—that so soon as I was sufficiently recovered, I resolved upon making another attempt to procure an interview with you. Mr. Gunthorpe: by some means ascertained that you and Lady Macdonald, together with Lord Harold, had suddenly been invited to pay a visit to Saxondale Castle; and he hurried me off the day before yesterday. By accident I formed the acquaintance of a young man who lives in Gainsborough; and with him as my guide, I came yesterday into the vicinage of the Castle to take a view of the grounds, and see whether there would be the chance of throwing myself in your way should you happen to walk forth alone. This morning I returned hither in that hope; and, thank heaven, it has not been frustrated. But dearest, Florina, I think it would be prudent if you were to do your best to conceal from Lady Saxondale for the present the circumstance that you are acquainted with her infamy. Mr. Gunthorpe recommends and enjoins this. I do not exactly know what his motives are; but he has assuredly good reasons for the advice he gives. He does not believe that Lady Saxondale will suffer law-proceedings to be instituted against her on my account: but if she be obstinate, Mr. Gunthorpe will do his best to spare your brother from as much share in the infamy as possible."

"Oh! William; I can no longer think of him as a brother!" exclaimed Florina, weeping. "And yet it is hard to be compelled to speak thus!"

"If I forgive him, my well-beloved," responded Deveril, "you cannot refuse to do so. But is it not strange that Lady Saxondale should have included him in this invitation to Lady Macdonald and yourself?"

"The evening before last, soon after our arrival," said Florina, thoughtfully, "Harold and her ladyship walked for an hour together in the garden. They were alone—and yesterday morning Harold departed suddenly for London again,"

"Indeed!" ejaculated Deveril. "Depend upon it he has undertaken some fresh mission for her ladyship."

"Oh, my deluded, beguiled, unhappy brother!"

"An idea strikes me," continued Deveril. "Doubtless it is in connexion with this threatened lawsuit: for her ladyship has received a letter from her solicitors to the effect that an appeal to that tribunals was menaced. But fear nothing. Whatsoever Harold may undertake will most probably become known to Mr. Gunthorpe. The person whose name attests that document which you have read, is in Mr. Gunthorpe's pay. Do not be afraid that this *espionnage* instituted upon your brother's actions, is for any evil purpose. No, no—Mr. Gunthorpe is incapable of wrong doing: he is the most excellent of men."

"Since you have such perfect confidence in him, William, I must have the same. And notwithstanding my brother Harold treated him superciliously on the first night he introduced himself to us—it was at the Opera—I was prepossessed in the old gentleman's favour."

"He failed not to observe your kindness, Florina, in contrast with Harold's rudeness."

"And Angela Vivaldi—that beautiful creature whose very form is the embodiment of poesy—Angela Vivaldi is your sister?"

"She is: and I am proud of her—but for reasons which I will presently explain, we avoid appearing before the world in the light of brother and sister. Although in that sphere the very air of which is generally believed to be full of blight for female virtue, yet she is purity itself. Oh! Florina, if on that night when you visited my abode, no circumstances had transpired to fill you with suspicions and drive you away from my threshold,—if you had crossed that threshold—if you had entered my home, you would not have disdained to give your hand to the celebrated Opera-dancer. You would have seen that her very look is chastity and innocence—that she is a being of a superior order—and that in manners and conduct she is the elegant and well-bred woman. You have seen her upon the stage: did you ever observe her cast a glance inconsistent with immaculate modesty?"

"No—never, never," replied Florina

"Angela Vivaldi's virtue was proverbial; and you may conceive the shock that it gave me when under a fearful combination of circumstances, I was led to believe everything injurious alike to her and to you. But is *she* also acquainted with our secret? Of course she must be: it is natural you should have told her."

"I preserved that secret religiously until it transpired as one of the consequences of the duel. Yes,—I preserved it for your sake, Florina; because I deemed it to be a secret of so solemn a character that it ought not to be revealed. even to a sister, until you should vouchsafe the permission. I considered it to be *your* secret even more than *mine*, because I knew how you were situated in respect to Edmund Saxondale, and I thought it best to retain everything closely locked up in my own heart until you, in your own good time, should have told me that there was no longer need for such secrecy."

"You are all kindness and consideration, William, as you are all that is generous and noble," said Florina, with affection beaming in her beauteous blue eyes and as she gazed upon her lover her countenance reflected the emotions that swelled in her soul deeper and happier than she had ever yet experienced in her whole life—unless an exception must be made for that day on which this love of her's was first avowed and the reciprocal passion confessed.

"When forced into that duel," resumed Deveril, "and seeing myself as it were face to face with death, I adopted those measnres which prudence and my own honour demanded. I wrote several letters, to bs delivered in case I fell. One was to you, Florina—assuring you of mine innocence as well as of my love, and beseeching that you would sometimee bestow a thought on him whose heart had been so devotedly your's."

"Oh William! what must you have suffered!"—and the beautiful creature threw her arms round his neck and kissed him of her own accord: but as she withdrew her countenance again, she left upon his cheeks the tears that had started from her blue eyes.

"Am I not now fully recompensed?" exclaimed Deveril, with enthusiastic fondness. "But let me continue. Another letter was to my sister Angela, bidding her the tenderest farewells; and a third was to Mr. Gunthorpe. In this letter I gave him the fullest explanation how I had been provoked to a duel by Lord Harold Staunton and I revealed to him the secret of my devoted love for you—beseeching that in case I fell, he would personally become the bearer of the letter which I had written to you, my sweet Florina,—so that he might tell you all he knew of my character and help to corroborate the assurances I had penned of my innocence towards Lady Saxondale. For two days after the duel I remained insensible of what was passing around. Mr. Gunthorpe, visiting my lodgings in Pall Mall, in pursuance of an intimation which he received from my second, Mr. Forester, found the letters and perused the one addressed to himself. Thus was it, Florina, that he discovered the secret of our love."

"But wherefore did he not bring to me the letter which you had written, and which was intended for me?" asked Florina.

"Because the express injunction was penned by my hand upon the envelope to the effect that it was only to be delivered in case I should fall in the duel."

"Oh! if that horror had taken place!"—and the fair young creature shuddered with a cold tremor from head to foot at the bare idea.

"To possess your sympathy and your love, is sweet beyond description—it is paradise ineffable!"—and again did William Deveril press the young maiden to his heart. "Think you, sweet Florina," he continued after a pause, "that your absence from the Castle will be noticed? think you that there is any danger of our being intruded upon?"

"No: my aunt will not come out this morning—Miss Farefield has gone to ride with a gentleman of the neighbourhood—and Lady Saxondale intimated after breakfast that she should be occupied for several hours in writing letters."

"If, then, we may safely enjoy another half-hour of each other's society," said Deveril, "I will narrate to you a few incidents connected with myself and Angela. This is the time, my beloved Florina, for the fullest confidence."

"I shall listen," responded the young lady, "with a most heartfelt interest. Everything that regards you, William, is now of consequence to me. If you have sorrows to speak of, I can sympathize with them; and if you tell me of joys and reminiscences of past happiness, I can share the delights accompanying your retrospection."

"You will not expect to hear, Florina, that I am of good family or of gentle birth," resumed Deveril; "and it was perhaps some little false pride on my part that prevented me from proffering certain explanations on that memorable and happy day when you first suffered me to know that I loved you not in vain. I had it on the tip of my tongue to tell you that Angela was my sister; but I knew you not *then* as I know you *now*, and I feared that it might shock those lofty notions in which you have been reared—and I at all events thought it better to reserve that and other explanations until another occasion. Had I been more candid,—or rather had I *then* appreciated as I ought to have done the generosity of your nature, which enables you to rise superior to the artificial conventionalisms of aristocratic circles,—how much unhappiness would have been spared us both! However, the past cannot be recalled, much as it may be regretted; and I will now tell you my story."

"Proceed, dearest William," said Florina: "I am all attention."

"My earliest reminiscences," commenced Deveril," are connected with a troop of strolling players, to which company my father and mother belonged. Their name was Deveril. I am about a year older than my sister Angela; and I recollect that in her infancy she was one of the most beautiful little cherubs that ever constituted a parent's joy. Although in such humble circumstances—exposed to all the sad vicissitudes of a strolling life—our father and mother were exceedingly kind to us, and treated us with the tenderest affection. They were superior people in their way. My mother had belonged to a respectable family, but by marrying a poor clerk, as my father at first was, she was altogether discarded by her relatives and friends. My father was one of those gay thoughtless men who cannot appreciate the value of money: and with but a very small salary and a wife to keep, he fell into difficulties. Unable to pay his debts, and threatened with a prison, he absconded from his native town, his loving wife being the partner of his flight. From what I have often heard him say, I am but too well aware that he and my mother must have endured great privations and gone through incalculable sufferings; for being unable to refer to his last situation, he failed to procure another. In short, dire necessity drove them both to join a troop of strolling players; and as my father was a very handsome man, and my mother a most beautiful woman, they were received into the troop more on account of their personal attractions than for any histrionic talents which they possessed. Notwithstanding my mother's great beauty and the temptations to which as a poor actress she was constantly exposed, I feel proud in being enabled to pay this tribute to her memory, by assuring you that her character was retained unimpeachable until the last. During her leisure hours she instructed me and Angela in the rudiments of education: for she herself had been well educated. She died when I was about eight years old; and I recollect how bitter was my grief. Nor did little Angela fail to appreciate even more keenly than might be expected in a child of her age, the great loss we had sustained. My father was inconsolable; and for some weeks he was utterly unable to pursue his professional avocations. The consequence was that penury and want entered our little lodging, and our sufferings were great."

Here Florina pressed her lover's hand between both her own, and gazed upon him with tearful looks. The glances that he bent upon her in return were full of affectionate gratitude for the sympathy which she thus mutely but eloquently testified; and his narrative was continued in the following terms:—

"Necessity compelled my father to subdue his grief as much as he was able, and appear again upon the stage. The very first night that he thus came forth again in some large provincial town — I forget which—his fine person attracted the notice of an eminent Italian painter who was on a visit to this country for the purpose of beholding the progress of its arts and science. He was at that particular period making a tour in the provinces; and accident led him to visit the theatre on the special occasion referred to. On the following day he made inquiries for my father's abode —called, and represented that if my father would accompany him back to Italy, he would be sure to make a good income by serving as a model for painters and sculptors. Signor Vivaldi—for that was the name of the Italian—offered to pay all the travelling expenses for my father and his children; and in short, behaved so liberally that his proposal was accepted. We accordingly repaired to Italy, and took up our abode in Florence, Signor Vivaldi's native city. The promises which he had held out, were fully realized; and my father earned a competency. Signor Vivaldi was an elderly man; and though he obtained large prices for his pictures, yet he had a number of profligate relations dependent upon him, and to whom he was too kind—and thus he was always poor. My father had become quite a steady man, and learnt to appreciate the value of money. He gave myself and Angela an excellent education,--taking pride indeed to economize as much as possible with regard to his own expenditure, that he might accomplish this. His great aim, and indeed his ruling idea, was to make a splendid dancer of Angela. The taste which she had exhibited for the art even from her childhood, had probably suggested this thought: and accordingly, as she grew up, the best masters in the Terpsichorean art were engaged to render her proficient. Meanwhile Signor Vivaldi had taken a great fancy to me, and was accustomed to have me at his *studio* during my leisure hours to teach me his own art, At that period painting in fast colours upon ivory was greatly in vogue in the Tuscan States; and I acquired a taste for this beautiful study. It was somewhat out of the way of Signor Vivaldi's genius; but still, as a great artist, his suggestions were most valuable; and under his supervision I copied with some success his own fine pictures on miniature ivory-plates. Thus was it that time passed on until two years back, when I reached the age of about seventeen, and my sister was consequently sixteen. At this period a terrible calamity occurred to us, Our father was smitten with paralysis, which from the very first threatened to prove fatal. For two or three weeks he was unconscious of everything that passed around him; but at length he rallied somewhat, and partially recovered the use of his speech. I am now about to speak of his death-bed: for the flaming up of life's lamp was only a transient glow ere it suddenly became extinguished for ever. Ah! full well do I recollect that final scene! it was midnight—the candles were burning in the chamber, so soon to be that of death—the physicians were on one side of the couch—Angela and myself were on the other. Our poor father, who in his last moments completely recovered his intellect and partially his voice, intimated that he had some important secret to reveal. As he thus spoke he fixed his eyes earnestly upon me and gave me to understand that it was specially with regard to myself that he had to speak. But a sudden dimness came upon his eyes—his countenance grew convulsed—it was evident that he battled with all his remaining energies against the Destroyer in order that he might gain a few moments' respite to reveal the secret to which he had alluded. But death's grasp was fixed too powerfully upon him: he merely gave utterance to a few words, of which '*strolling players*'——'*manager*'——'*Thompson*'——'*could tell all*'—were alone distinguishable: and then he gave up the ghost."

Here William Deveril paused; and tears started from his eyes as he mournfully pondered upon that death-scene, now so vividly brought back to his memory. Florina pressed his hand in silence. She felt that his sorrow was too sacred to be intruded upon by words; but her looks and her tears also showed how much she sympathized with her lover.

"Whatever my father's secret might have been," he at length resumed, "it appears to have died with him—unless indeed the few unconnected words which my ear managed to catch up in his last moments, should ever serve as a clue to the developments, of the mystery. What the secret could be, or how it might affect me more than Angela, I could not possibly conjecture—nor can I know. It is useless therefore to dwell upon it. The remains of our poor father were interred in the picturesque cemetery outside the walls of Florence; and Angela and I mingled our tears over the grave of the departed. But we were not without friends to succour and console us. In consequence of the expensive education which our father had given us, he died poor. Indeed, when the funeral expenses were paid, I and Angela found ourselves almost penniless, and it yet required another six months' constant practice to fit her for the sphere for which she had been brought up—I mean the operatic ballet. Signor Vivaldi however assisted us. He paid for the masters whose services were required to finish Angela's Terpsichorean education; and he continued, with more assiduity than ever, to instruct me in the art of ivory painting. Thus several months passed: and at length I became so far proficient in my own studies that I was enabled to dispose of my little paintings to considerable advantage. O Florina! never did I eat bread so sweet as that which was purchased with the produce of the sale of my first ivory-plate. I felt that I was independent, even of friendly benevolence; and this feeling for those who have been placed in a situation to appreciate it, is a joyous one indeed. At the same time, too, my dear sister had finished her education as a dancer, and was to appear upon the stage. By the advice of her masters, as well as of Signor Vivaldi and other friende who had interested themselves on our behalf, it was determined that she should adopt an Italian name for her *debut*; because if it were generally known that she was an English girl, there would be a prejudice against her. I do not mean that this prejudice would have arisen from any national aversion against the English generally — but simply from the fact that the Italians entertain the belief that the English cannot possibly excel, no matter how well tutored, in dancing, singing, or music. Therefore, for this reason, it was resolved that Angela should assume an Italian surname, the Christian one which a mother's doting fondness had given her being sufficiently Italian to be preserved. As a compliment to our kind friend the painter, and by his special permission, she adopted that of Vivaldi. Her *debut* was not so successful as her friends had hoped and expected it would be: still it was not a failure. She could not throw off that natural timidity which was so closely connected with the innocence of her character and the purity of her soul; and thus she failed to do justice to the real powers and qualifications which she possessed as a dancer. Some months passed, and she continued to improve in respect to conquering her timidity — but slowly. At length it happened that the manager of the Italian Opera in London arrived in Florence; and being much struck with Angela's appearance, as well as as perhaps foreseeing the certainty of her future fame, he sought us out at our dwelling and offered her an engagement. She did not however accept it hurriedly: for in Florence we had good friends and I had found many patrons, so that we were ensured a competency — whereas if we renounced present certainties with the uncertain hope of more brilliant prospects, we felt that we should be acting unwisely and rashly. We therefore declined making terms with the English manager on Angela's account, but promised that if on future occasion he still entertained the same favourable opinion of Angela's qualifications, his proposal should be the first accepted elsewhere than in Florence. The flattering compliment paid to Angela by the mere circumstance of the English manager's officer, inspired her with new courage to prosecute the career in which she had embarked: and when the season at Florence commenced again, she acquitted herself in a manner that was most triumphant. From that day forth her success was immense and her reputation was established. But at the period of which I am now speaking, a circumstance occurred which threw a sad damp upon our spirits: this was the death of our kind benefactor Signor Vivaldy. He died in comparative poverty, and leaving some debts. He had left three or four pictures in a finished state, and one that was very nearly completed: these his executors advertised for sale—and when the day came to dispose of them by auction, there was a considerable attendance of bidders at the deceased painter's house. Amongst them was Mr. Gunthorpe, who reading the advertisement in the Italian newspapers, journeyed from Naples—his place of residence—for the purpose."

"What! is Mr. Gunthorpe attached to the fine arts?" asked Florina, with some degree of astonishment, inasmuch as there was little indeed in that gentleman's appearance to warrant such a belief.

"There is no man in Europe who possesses a more exquisite taste," answered Deveril. "He has brought with him to England countless packages containing the most beautiful specimens of Italian arts, in painting and sculpture, that money could purchase; and he intends them for the decoration of a mansion which he purposes to erect or buy. But let me continue my story. Mr. Gunthorpe was so pleased with the deceased Signor Vivaldi's pictures, that he outbid every one at the sale, and became their purchaser for a considerable price,—the unfinished one as well those that were complete. This circumstance made me acquainted with him: and on the day after the sale, I happened to be in the *studio* of my deceased benefactor, finishing a miniature copy of the very one which was incomplete, when Mr. Gunthorpe came to fetch the pictures away. He inspected my work, and was astonished to find that in my miniature I had perfected that which was still wanting to complete the original. He asked me if I could paint in oil: I told him that I had received some lessons from my departed friend. He inquired whether I would undertake to complete the as yet unfinished pictures in the same way as I had perfected my miniature copy? I undertook the task, which occupied some weeks; and every day Mr. Gunthorpe came to my abode, whither I had removed the picture, to watch its progress towards completion. Thus we became still more intimate; and the old gentleman exhibited an increasing friendship towards myself and Angela. At length the picture was finished: he was well satisfied. and offered me a munificent reward. But I refused it, declaring that I had already received an ample recompense in the honour of being permitted to perfect one of my deceased benefactors' masterpieces. Mr. Gunthorpe did not press me very much after my first refusal to accept the proffered remuneration: but he became more friendly than ever towards me. At length, after an interval of secession from the stage as a tribute of respect to the memory of our deceased friend, Angela resumed her occupations. Mr. Gunthorpe went to see her, and was delighted. We informed him of the proposals made by the English manager; and he at once counselled Angela to accept them. He farther observed that he himself was shortly coming to England, and would be delighted to renew his acquaintance with us there. He then took his departure from Florence; and we regretted him—for he had been a great favourite with us. Negotiations were at once opened with the English manager, and an engagement was effected on the most liberal terms for my sister. Although it still wanted many months to the Opera season in London, we nevertheless resolved to proceed to England at once; and to this step we are induced by several reasons. In the first place we were both so young on leaving the country that many of its habits and custom had been lost to our recollection: and it was quite requisite that Angela should render herself familiar therewith, in order that she might not experience a recurrence of her timidity on finding herself too suddenly in the presence of a strange people. Moreover we had both for some time past experienced a yearning to visit our native land; and I had also heard that the art of painting on ivory having been just introduced into fashionable circles as an amusement for young ladies, there would be ample scopes for the exercise of whatsoever little talent I might possess therein. I was also desirous of instituting some inquiries in respect to the words my father had uttered on his death bed. We accordingly proceeded at once to England; but by the advice of the manager of the Opera—indeed, by his express stipulation—Angela retained her self-given name of Vivaldi. In respect to myself it being considered that the circumstance of my sister being a dancer might prove a barrier to my admission into the wealthy families with whom my art was alone available, it was resolved to retain our close affinity as secret as possible. I therefore took that secluded villa near the Regent's Park as our private residence, and engaged chambers in Pall Mall as my ostensible abode and for my professional avocations. At the villa Angela and I dwelt in almost complete seclusion,—such being our taste and our preference. Thus months passed on; and at length within a few days of the opening of the Opera, Mr. Gunthorpe arrived in London. By inquiry of the manager he found out where we were residing; for in the general interdiction against Angela's address being given at the theatre to anybody a special exception was made in favour of our old friend. You know with what success my sister made her *debut* in London, and how she has achieved a succession of triumphs. Once more referring to that unfortunate affair of the duel, must observe that Mr. Gunthorpe discovered it was to take place, and came upon the ground to prevent it. You can have no difficulty, in conjecturing my dear Florina, from whom he obtained the information. I was compelled on that morning to suffer the kind old gentleman to undergo some indignity on the part of the seconds in the duel: they bound him to a gate in order to prevent his interference. But had I acted in his defence, I should have incurred the risk of being proclaimed a coward, and my intervention on his part would have been ascribed to a desire on my own to escape the duel. During the week that I lay so dangerously ill in consequence of my wound, Angela did not appear at the Opera, the apology being a severe indisposition. And now, Florina, I have told you everything that regards myself: I have not concealed from you my humble parentage——"

"And if possible," murmured the beauteous creature, "I love you all the more for your candour. But those mysterious words which your father uttered upon his death-bed, seem to ring in my ears as if I myself had heard them."

"And I also think of them often," responded Deveril. "It would seem as if a person of the name of Thompson, the manager of a strolling troop—most probably that to which my parents at the time belonged—is acquainted with the secret to which my father alluded in his last moment. You may be sure that immediately on my arrival in England I instituted inquiries amongst persons acquainted with dramatic affairs, to ascertain if this Thompson could be heard of. I also inserted some advertisements in the newspapers, requesting him to communicate his address; and, if needful, he should be liberally rewarded. But the steps I thus took all proved vain: and therefore am I fearful that my father's secret has died with him."

"At this moment the clock over the entrance-tower of Saxondale Castle proclaimed one: and the lovers were thus made aware that they had been full two hours together. Almost immediately afterwards the bell rang for luncheon: and Florina, starting from the seat, exclaimed, "We must separate now, dear William! for if I don't answer that summons, a domestic will be sent to inform me that luncheon is served up."

"How long, think you dearest Florina, that you will stay at Saxondale Castle?" asked Deveril.

"The invitation was for some weeks," she responded: "but if I must dissimulate my aversion and horror of Lady Saxondale, it will be impossible to pay the hypocrite so long. I could not do such violence to my feelings——"

"Perhaps circumstances may transpire to abridge your visit," said Deveril. "For instance, if Mr. Gunthorpe should advise, after all that has passed between you and me today, that everything which we have learnt concerning Lady Saxondale should be made known to your aunt——for remember Mr. Gunthorpe is, as he informed me, the intimate friend of your uncle the Marquis of Eagledean, and he may therefore feel himself justified in interfering to save you and Lady Macdonald from the contamination of Lady Saxondale's society——"

"In that case," ejaculated Florina "my aunt would flee away in a moment. She is a good woman, though worldly-minded, but upright and conscientious."

"We shall see what will happen," said Deveril. "Meanwhile you *must*, dear Florina, dissemble your feelings towards Lady Saxondale, whatsoever amount of violence you may do yourself. And now farewell for the present, my well-beloved. To-morrow I must return to London."

"Farewell, dearest William—farewell,"

The lovers embraced tenderly and affectionately, and then separated.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE ACCIDENT AND THE RESCUE.

WILLIAM Deveril scaled the low fence, traversed the park, and by making a small circuit, regained the river's bank, which not only led towards Gainsborough, but likewise constituted the most agreeable walk: for he thereby avoided the dusty highway. He had come on foot in order to avoid exciting suspicion by the presence of a vehicle waiting in the neighbourhood; and thus he had a good walk of some few miles before him. He was still rather too enfeebled from the effects of the duel to take so much exercise: but what fatigues would he not have dared in order to obtain an interview with Florina!—and what weariness was there that could not be compensated for by the delicious reflections inspired by all that had just taken place!

Indeed, our young hero felt as if he were altogether a new being. Never had his heart felt so light — never had his spirits seemed so buoyant. A new strength appeared to invigorate him: he felt as if entering entirely upon another phase of existence.

As he was proceeding along the bank of the river enjoying the luxury of his reflections, he observed a strange-looking woman approaching from the contrary direction. She was dressed in a sordid slovenly manner—indeed, wretchedly clad: a dirty white cap appeared beneath an old straw bonnet; and though it was the middle of summer, she wore a dingy-coloured cloak all tattered round the lower edge. As she drew nearer still, Deveril could not help observing that her features were singularly harsh, coarse, and repulsive; and she had altogether a look of a sinister character.

"I suppose," she said in a grating voice, "that building I see yonder is Saxondale Castle?"

"It is," replied Deveril.

"Thank you for the information," said the woman: and passing him by she continued her way in the direction of the baronial structure.

Deveril, as he walked on, could not help wondering what that woman wanted at the Castle, and he concluded that she was one of those persons who go about the country seeking the charity of wealthy individuals. But while these thoughts were still hovering in his mind, it struck him that he heard a sound like a splashing in the water. He stopped short, and looked back. There was a group of trees close upon the edge of the bank, which intercepted his view of the place where the woman ought to be if she were still pursuing her way towards the castle. A cry for help now met his ears; and convinced that some accident had occurred, he rushed back in the way which he had been pursuing. The instant he passed the clump of trees, he beheld the woman struggling in the water; and the next moment she sank, disappearing, from his view. Without the slightest hesitation Deveril plunged in, and was immediately out of his depth; for the river was exceedingly deep in that part. He could swim well; but being now much enfeebled through his recent illness, and by the fatigues of the long walk he had been taking, he felt on rising to the surface that he was in a position of great danger. Had he therefore consulted his own safety alone, he would at once have got back to land: but there was a life to be saved, and he was too magnanimous not to risk his own to save it. The woman appeared again upon the surface of the water a little lower down; and a wild cry which she sent forth, rang through the air. Deveril struck out with a vigour which even astonished himself, and was immediately at the spot where she sank. He dived once — twice — thrice, unsuccessfully; and though nearly exhausted, he plunged down a fourth time. His hand clutched a garment — he succeeded in lifting the woman to the surface—she was quite insensible—and in this state he managed to get her forth in safety. But scarcely had he dragged her upon the bank, when a sense of utter exhaustion came over him: he endeavoured to shake it off: but could not—and consciousness abandoned him.

When he awoke to life again, he was in bed in a very small, humble-looking, but neat chamber. He had the taste of some burning spirit in his mouth; and an elderly female, in a peasant-garb, was chafing his hands and temples.

"Ah! now he opens his eyes again, cried the woman, in the joyful tone which indicated a kind and benevolent heart.

"That's all right," said a tall stalwart-looking young peasant, entering from another room at the sound of the woman's voice. "The gin did it—I told you it would, mother."

"Or the chafing and the rubbing—which, John?" said the kind-hearted old creature. "But how does the woman get on?"

"Sister says she's nice enough," returned the peasant. "Pray how do you feel now sir?"

"Better — thanks to the kind care which I have evidently received here," responded Deveril, to whom the question was addressed: but he spoke in a very weak voice, and he felt that he was indeed much exhausted.

"I suppose it was an accident, sir?" said the peasant.

"Yes: the woman, to whom I presume you have alluded, fell into the river. I succeeded in saving her—but was so enfeebled that I fainted on the bank."

"Don't talk too much, there's a dear young gentleman," said the old woman. "My John was dreadfully alarmed when he saw what he thought was two dead bodies lying on the bank, side by side too: but he soon discovered that you was both alive, though senseless,—so he run back to the cottage, got me and my daughter to go down with him, and between us three we soon got you here safe. John undressed you and got you into bed; and here have I been more than half-an-hour trying to bring you to. I really was afraid at one time it was all up with you."

Deveril could not speak, so heavy was the sense of exhaustion upon him: but his looks showed his gratitude.

"We have put your clothes to dry by the fire," continued the woman, who, if she was discreet enough to bid Deveril not to talk too much, seemed inclined to be garrulous herself: "but I don't think you will be able to move out of this place to-day. If you like to stay here, sir, I am sure you are quite welcome. A gentleman like you that risks his life for a poor gipsy kind of woman as t'other is, deserves every attention — and you will get it here. If you want to send anywhere and tell your friends what's happened and where you are, my son John will hurry off and deliver the message."

Deveril now gained strength enough to reply that he was a mere temporary visitor at Gainsborough, and that there was no necessity for any trouble to be taken on his behalf, unless it were that John should go to the hotel at which he had put up and procure a change of apparel from his portmanteau. Accordingly, provided with the requisite instructions, the sturdy peasant set out on his errand. Soon afterwards Deveril fell into a deep sleep; and when he awoke again, the erubescent beams of the setting sun were shining in the lattice window of the little chamber.

He had thus slept many hours, and was considerably refreshed. John had returned long ago with the garments he had sent for; and the woman of the cottage brought the patient up some good broth which she had prepared for him while he slumbered. He did ample justice to her frugal fare, and felt invigorated by the meal. Nevertheless, as the cottage was three miles distant from Gainsborough, and there was no conveyance without sending thither for one, he resolved upon staying where he was till the morning, in the hope that a good night's rest might restore him. Having thus expressed himself, he inquired relative to the woman whom he had rescued from the river.

"She is up, and as well again as if nothing had happened," was the response, given by the old female of the cottage. "Her clothes were dried by the fire—she has put them on—and would have taken herself off a couple of hours back, only that she said, she would remain till you awoke, that she might thank you for risking your own life to save hers."

"She wishes to see me, then!" said Deveril. "You can tell her to come in."

The woman of the cottage first of all drew the little curtain over the window, for it was now dusk; and she then lighted a candle in the room. Deveril raised himself partially on the bolster, and pushed back the cloud of black hair which had intruded upon his noble forehead. He had on a coarse shirt belonging to the peasant; and the collar happening to be deficient in a button, it was all open at the neck. This circumstance Deveril did not perceive; but had a painter or a sculptor been there at the moment, the beautiful countenance of the youth, his classic-shaped head, and the expression of his features, would have proved a fine study. The complexion of his face was slightly embrowned by a long residence in the Italian clime; but his neck, and so much of his shoulders as the open shirt revealed, were as white as the skin of woman. One hand rested beneath his head — the other lay outside the bed-clothes. And a beautifully modelled hand was it, with tapering fingers and almond-shaped nails that the fairest scion of the aristocracy might have envied him the possession of.

In a few minutes the door opened, and the woman whom he had rescued from the water made her appearance. She came alone; and shutting the door, sat down by the bed in which Deveril was lying.

"I am not accustomed," she at once began in her harsh disagreeable voice "to much softness of feeling; but I could not possibly go away without saying that I do possess sufficient to render me grateful for your noble conduct. How do you feel now? Are you better?"

Extraordinary was it that at the

very instant the woman asked these questions, Deveril felt a sudden return of that sense of exhaustion which had seized upon him on the river's bank. It was no doubt a faintness produced by the fatigue of sitting up in bed to partake of the food he had eaten, and also by having conversed with the woman of the cottage during the whole time. He murmured that he felt very ill—asked for water—and ere it could be given him, sank off into unconsciousness again.

When he opened his eyes, the woman was bending over him, bathing his head with a wet towel; and in a few minutes he recovered completely. She now gave him a glass of water, and questioned him with an earnestness amounting to even a degree of anxiety as to how he felt. He assured her that he was much better;—and now, as his eyes regained their complete power of vision, and the light of the candle fell upon the woman's countenance, it occurred to him that she was gazing upon him with a singular expression in which interest and curiosity appeared to be blended. Slowly did she resume her seat by the side of the bed; and again she asked if he felt better?

"Yes—much better," he returned. "I do not even feel as if I had so recently experienced a fainting fit again."

"Do you think that without exhausting yourself," inquired the woman, "you could talk to me for a few minutes?"

"No doubt," replied Deveril. "But, my poor creature, I do not wish you to say any more to express your gratitude."

"I am not going to say another word upon the subject. Perhaps I may be enabled to prove by deeds—which are better than words—that I am grateful; for you have saved my life, And who knows but that it was intended for me to trip upon the bank and fall into the river that you might have an opportunity of saving me?"

"Intended?" echoed Deveril, gazing upon the harsh repulsive features of the woman with unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes—*intended,*" she said, "I mean, *by heaven.* I suppose, young man, you believe in Providence?"

"Indeed I do—most sincerely!" replied Deveril; and as he spoke, his looks, sent upward a mute but eloquent thanksgiving for his deliverance.

"And I begin to do so: but I did not always," quickly rejoined the woman. "Do not interrupt me," she continued, perceiving that he was again stricken by the singularity of her looks and language: "you are too weak to talk more than is necessary. Novertheless I wish you would answer me a few questions: but don't inquire why I put them. Your name is William Deveril: I saw it on your card just now amongst the things taken out of the pockets of your wet clothes. You are the same, then, who fought with Lord Harold Staunton? Ah, poor young man! no wonder you are weak and enfeebled. Yet weak and enfeebled as you are, you perilled your life for me. Were it for a beautiful creature of sixteen, the act would still have been noble: but for a miserable wretch such as I am, it is beyond all praise!"—and again did the singular woman gaze with a peculiar expression upon Deveril's countenance: then she muttered to herself, "Dark hair—dark eyes—delicate acquiline features—short upper lip, with an aristocratic curl—beautiful teeth white as pearls, and faultlessly even——"

"If," said Deveril, with a good-natured smile, "these are you questions, I really cannot hear them."

"Yes, singularly brilliant teeth," muttered the woman to herself, as that smile revealed the pearly objects of her admiration. "But to the point," she spoke aloud "Do you know who your father was?

"I hope so," replied Deveril, again smiling for the question struck him as almost ludicrously singular: "and I revere his memory."

"Then he is dead? How long ago did he die?" asked the woman.

It immediately occurred to Deveril that the woman really belonged to the gipsy tribe, and that she was about to exercise the craft of her race in fortune-telling: but being naturally too good-natured to offend her, he again smiled, saying, "If you have really nothing of importance to say to me, you can well understand that I am in no state for a prolonged discourse."

"I knew you would interrupt me with these observations," remarked the woman. "In this world one dares not ask a question without stating the why and the because. But will you believe me that my objects *are* important; and therefore if you speak unnecessarily, it will be your own fault."

"Proceed then: I will humour you," said Deveril, again being struck by the manner in which the woman regarded him, as well as by the mingled sincerity and gravity with which she spoke. "Proceed."

"I asked you how long ago your father died?"

"Two years."

"And on his death-bed did he tell you nothing? did he leave no particular documents behind him?"

"Good heavens! what mean you? wherefore these questions?" cried Deveril.

"Do not excite yourself," said the woman. "You must really let me go on in my own way: but you begin to perceive that it is *not* through mere impertinent curiosity I am questioning you. However, if you feel excited now, I will meet you anywhere you like tomorrow."

"No—I must return to London," said Deveril; "and therefore whatever is to pass between us, let it take place now. I feel stronger than I was; and I am already interested in the discourse."

"Then have the goodness to answer my question," rejoined the woman.

"On his death-bed my father endeavoured to say something. He was stricken with paralysis, and his speech came with the utmost difficulty. A few words however I did succeed in catching——"

"And those words" demanded the woman, with an eagerness that contrasted strangely with her usually cold stern imperturbability of manner.

"Those words were exactly these;—"*Strolling players—manager—Thompson—could tell all:*"

"And have you any idea of what those allusions meant?"

"I can only suppose that inasmuch as my father and mother had originally been connected with a troop of itinerant actors——"

"Is your mother alive?" demanded the woman abruptly.

"No: she died between eleven and twelve years ago."

"What are you doing in the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle?" she now asked, in that peremptory way of her's which seemed to imply that responses *must* be given to her queries.

"I cannot permit myself to be questioned any further," said Deveril coldly."

"Yes: but I insist upon having your answers!" exclaimed the woman: then observing that a sudden flush of indignation appeared upon the invalid's countenance, she immediately added, "There! now don't be silly—I did not mean to offend you. It is the way in which I speak. Of course I do not wish to pry into your secret affairs; but if you had been to Saxondale Castle, it is somewhat important that I should know it."

"And how so?" asked Deveril.

"You must not become the questioner," replied the woman. "Do you know Lady Saxondale?"—and she fixed her eyes with so singular, so peculiar, so earnest a look upon the youth that he felt troubled as if he were being plunged into a vortex of unfathomable mysteries.

"Yes—I know her ladyship," he answered: and he felt urged on thus to answer by a power stronger than himself. "But I have not been to see her now—nor have I set foot within the walls of Saxondale Castle. Indeed, I was never there in my life."

"Never!—Ah!"—and the expression of the woman's countenance now became so exceedingly singular that Deveril started up in the couch.

"What in heaven's name," he cried, "is the meaning of all this? Why do you look at me thus? To what is this conversation to lead? For God's sake speak—explain yourself! Do you know that you are torturing me cruelly? and I deserve it not at your hands!"

"No indeed—you deserve not torture from me—for you have saved my life at the deep risk of your own;"—and the woman spoke with an impressiveness as peculiar as her looks. "Pray believe me when I say that I would not torture you willingly, nor excite you unnecessarily. Lie down—compose yourself——"

"It is impossible so long as your looks and your language continue to pile up mystery upon mystery."

"It cannot be helped: I must pursue my own course. And now tell me—if you are acquainted with Lady Saxondale, why have you not called upon her at the castle? why should you be in the neighbourhood without seeing her, and yet knowing her?"

Deveril did not immediately answer: he paused to reflect what answer he *should* give, or whether any at all. While thus deliberating, his eyes settled upon the woman's countenance; and he beheld such an air of grave decision and solemn importance imprinted there, notwithstanding the repulsive harshness of her features, that he was convinced she had really the deepest meaning in putting all these questions to him. Indeed, she was evidently not a woman who would interrogate him for mere idle curiosity's—sake. In her very rags and in ugliness—aye, even in her sinister looks, there was a certain intellectual superiority together with a vigour of purpose apparent through all. He therefore decided upon answering her queries last put.

"Business with another person brought me into this neighbourhood. Who that person is, I do not choose to name, and beg that you will not ask. I came not to see Lady Saxondale—and to speak plainly, I do not wish to see her. She has used me ill."

"In what way?" demanded the woman.

"I do not know that there is any necessity for being reserved on this point," returned Deveril, "since she has told her own tale to all her acquaintances. In a word then, I had for some months past been wont to give lessons in painting to the Hon. Misses Farefield at Saxondale House in Park Lane, London—until her ladyship made improper overtures towards me——"

"Ah!" said the woman, not loud but with a deep and almost subdued sound: and again was there something extraordinary but most unfathomable in her looks. "Proceed. You rejected these overtures, did you not—did you not?" she asked quickly.

"I did: and this was my offence against Lady Saxondale. She proved vindictive,—bitterly, bitterly vindictive — and propagated the vilest calumnies amongst her friends, to the effect that it was *I* who had made improper advances towards *her*."

"Let me look you full in the face. There! meet my eyes. Your's quail not. Yes—you are speaking truly; there is sincerity in every feature. You are as good as you are beautiful. Nevertheless, look me again full in the face, and repeat that it was not *you* that made the overtures."

"As there is a God to judge me," exclaimed Deveril, with indignant emphasis, "I did not do so. It was her ladyship!"

"Enough—I believe you as firmly as if I had been a witness of the whole scene. Therefore, after that occurrence," continued the woman, "you went no more to Saxondale House?"

"I went to demand redress, but obtaining none, returned not again. Oh! now, for heaven's sake, tell me the drift of all these questions!" and Deveril spoke with anxious entreaty.

"We must go back," said the woman, not heeding his earnest words nor his pleading looks, "to earlier times. You say your parents were strolling players?"

"They were—and very poor. My mother died, as I have already told you; and then my father went to Italy, where I was brought up by him until he died also."

"And what were his circumstances in Italy?"

"Tolerably good. Indeed, he obtained a competency. But again I implore you——"

"Have you made any endeavour to find out the man Thompson to whom your father alluded in his last words?"

"I have made inquiries, and inserted advertisements—but all in vain."

"Thompson?" said the woman in a musing tone. "Most probably the manager of the strolling troop to which your father belonged—and evidently acquainted with a secret which your father meant to reveal upon his deathbed. Now, this Thompson shall be found out, if he is above ground. Though I wander all over England wearing out my very life in the search, he shall be found. I will either discover the living man, or the grave in which he is buried!"

The woman spoke with a resolute energy and a sternness of purpose that filled Deveril with astonishment, as well as excited his curiosity to the most torturing degree of suspense. Who was this strange being that accident had thrown in his way? how was it that she had taken so sudden an interest in his affairs? why should she wander about the world in search of the man Thompson? What earthly concern could she have in the affair? All these questions did Deveril put to himself, but without the possibility of answering them by means of any conjecture of his own. Suddenly a thought struck him. Was the whole thing a stratagem on her part to obtain money from him? was she pretending this deep interest in his affairs with the hope of making a draft upon his purse? He resolved to put her to the test.

"You seem to feel an interest in me," he said; "and you speak of traversing the land to discover something that intimately concerns me? As a matter of course, you expect that I shall pay your expenses——"

"Silence, boy!" exclaimed the woman with a look of such ineffable scorn that he was at once convinced he had gone entirely on the wrong track; and his suspicions on that head were quitted in a moment. "Do you think this is an affair of filthy lucre to me?" she asked, bending upon him a strange wild look: "or do you imagine that because I am clad thus miserably, and look a mere wandering beggar, I am affecting sympathy on your behalf for the sake of extracting the coin from your pocket? William Deveril, you utterly mistake me. Such is not my motive. But what it is, I do not intend to explain now,"—and she rose to depart.

"You cannot mean to leave me in this frightful state of suspense?" he said. "I do indeed perceive that there is a grave and a serious meaning at the bottom of all this, and you can well understand that my curiosity is painfully excited."

"I am sorry that I cannot gratify it. It would do no good now. You must restrain your feeling. Go about your avocations, whatsoever they may be, and wheresoever they may lie; and think no more of me for one whole month!"

"For one whole month!" echoed Deveril. "And then?"

"We will meet again. Carry it well in your mind;—this day month, at this same hour too—nine o'clock in the evening—we will meet in London. See that you keep this appointment: it may or it may not be important. If it is, so much the better: if not, there will be no harm done."

"But you have named no place where we are to meet."

"True!" said the woman: and then she appeared to reflect for upwards of a minute. "Tell me the place of your abode," she suddenly exclaimed.

Deveril at once named the villa in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park.

"Good!" said the woman: "One month hence, day for day and hour for hour, will I be at your dwelling. And now farewell."

Having thus spoken, the strange creature abruptly took her departure; and in a few moments Deveril heard the cottage door close behind her.

We will not make any farther attempt to analyze the conflicting emotions which this scene left in the mind of our young hero: they can be better imagined than described. Exhausted in every sense, he soon fell asleep through very weariness; and opened not his eyes again until the morning. He rose, considerably refreshed and invigorated by the uninterrupted slumber which he had enjoyed; and having dressed himself, he liberally rewarded the good-hearted peasants for all the kind attentions he had received at their hands. He then walked across to Gainsborough, whence he repaired to London by the earliest and readiest means that presented themselves.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE SIGN OF THE "BILLY-GOAT."

It was between nine and ten o'clock at night, when William Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe alighted from a private carriage in the immediate vicinity of old St. Pancras Church; and as they had previously rendered themselves acquainted with the position of Agar Town, by consulting the map of London, they had little trouble in making out its actual site. They crossed the canal bridge, and inquiring of a person whom they met which was the sign of the *Billy Goat*, were duly directed thither. On reaching the low boozing-ken, such uproarious sounds of uncouth merriment, mingled with horrible imprecations, came forth, that Deveril caught Mr. Gunthorpe by the arm, saying, "My dear sir. I think you had much better not venture into this horrible place."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe. "It is much worse for a young man like you—almost a boy, I might say—to penetrate into such a den. But it is necessary—and we will go together. Come—follow me."

Thus speaking, Mr. Gunthorpe pushed open the folding-doors of the public-house, and walked in, Deveril close at his heels.

"Tell them wagabones in the parlour there," exclaimed Solomon Patch, "not to make such a cussed row. Here's genelmen come in; and who knows but they have a mind to take a bottle of wine in a quiet comfortable manner?"

But as he spoke, the landlord of the

Billy Goat eyed the visitors suspiciously, as if he thought they might be the Commissioners of Police themselves, or a couple of functionaries from the Home Office, or any other officials invested with high authority.

"And tell them vimen," yelled out Mrs. Patch, "to leave off screaming and skreeking in such a hawful manner."

The injunctions of the landlord and landlady were issued to the dirty-looking pot-boy, who accordingly shuffled into the parlour, and with a knowing wink and a jerk of the thumb over the shoulder, said, "You had better be quiet here, 'cos why there's a couple of nobs jist looked in'"

"Then they'll stand treat," cried one of the women: and immediately afterwards a half-intoxicated creature, with a brazen look and her dress in the most immodest disorder, presented herself right in front of Mr. Gunthorpe, crying, "You'll stand a crown bowl, won't yer? I gnows you vill. I can see you are von of the right sort by your vicked old eye."

Mr. Gunthorpe's first impression was to utter a rebuke to the woman: but perceiving the state she was in, and having moreover no inclination to get into a controversy, he threw down half-a-sovereign, saying to the landlord, "I understand what is required of me: so you can send in liquor to this amount,"

Hereupon there was a burst of applause from the half-intoxicated woman and some dozen of shocking-looking ruffians who had crowded out from the parlour to see what was taking place; and when the uproar had subsided, numerous complimentary remarks were made in respect to Mr. Gunthorpe.

"I told yer he was a brick," said the woman who had elicited the donation,

"A regular trump," exclaimed Spider Bill, who was one of the party.

"A full-blown tulip, and no mistake," added Mat the Cadger.

"Von of the stumpy sort," observed Tony Wilkins—thereby meaning that Mr. Gunthorpe came down with his money handsomely,

"I on'y hope he's as rich as he's stout for his own sake," cried one of the women: and then there was a general laugh.

"Now do go in and keep yerselves *to* yerselves," exclaimed Solomon Patch: "or else not a mage's worth of lush shall ye see till you do:"—and then as soon as this threat had proved effectual, the landlord went on to say, addressing himself to the visitors with the most grovelling, fawning, obsequiousness, "You see, genelmen, I do my best to keep the place 'spectable; and last time I received the compliments of the cheerman at the Sessions House when I went for my license. Says he in a werry perlite manner, 'Mr. Patch,' says he, I have had a eye on your house for a many years; and I never knowed one so well-conducted in all London. It does you honour, Mr. Patch: and if knighthoods was given publicans, the Prime Minister should recommend you to the Queen for that honour.'—Now raly, genelmen, I am not proud, but that's what the cheerman did say."

"And I have no doubt you made a suitable acknowledgment," said Mr. Gunthorpe drily. "But come, can we have a bottle of wine in a private room?"

"To be sure, genelmen: you shall have the bar-parlour. Now, missus, clear away your needlework traps there, and make the cat get off the table. Walk round this way, genelmen. You can be all by yourselves here as comfortable as possible; and as for the wine, you will say you never tasted sich in all your life."

"I have not the slightest doubt of it" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Your name is Solomon Patch, I presume? You have already told us that it is Patch: but we want to speak to the person who has got the prefix of Solomon."

"It's me genelmen: that's my own wirtuous name for want of a better. But it's scriptural, genelmen—and that sanctifies a feller."

Mr. Gunthorpe looked as if he thought that for a person who was sanctified there never was such an ill-looking rascal in all the world. He however said nothing, but took his seat at the table in the bar-parlour, into which by this time he had proceeded, followed by Deveril. Mrs. Patch, having cleared away from the table her work-box and the worsted stockings she was darning, returned into the bar to serve the customers; while Solomon Patch, having shut the door of communication between the aforesaid bar and the parlour behind, drew the cork of a bottle of wine, produced three glasses, and then obsequiously filled two of them.

"Help yourself and sit down," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "We wish to have a little private conversation with you; and I may as well tell you at once that we have no hostile intent. We mean nothing of the sort: but we think you can serve us—and if so, you shall be rewarded."

"At this announcement Mr. Solomon Patch's manner became more obsequious than ever; and he likewise assumed an air of mysterious confidence as he drew his chair closer to that in which Mr. Gunthorpe was seated. This gentleman, producing his purse, drew forth two or three bank-notes and laid them upon the table—an operation which the rapacious landlord watched with considerable satisfaction.

"Now," resumed Mr. Gunthorpe "I am going to ask you two or three questions; and by the frankness of your replies will the amount of your reward be measured. In the first place, have you any correspondence with a lady of high rank, and who at this present moment is in the country?"

"A lady of high rank?" repeated Solomon, wondering whether his interlocutor could possibly mean Lady Bess: but almost at the same instant the thought struck him that the visit of the two gentlemen might be for the purpose of entrapping the female highwayman—a proceeding to which Solomon was by no means disposed to lend himself.

"Yes—a lady of high rank," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "and to be more explicit, I may state that she has a house in London and a country-seat in Lincolnshire."

"Then I have no sich a correspondent, sir," replied Solomon.

"But wherefore did you hesitate ere you answered?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe, eyeing the man closely,

"Because, sir, I'm a cautious and wary kind of a bird, saving your presence; and I'm not in the habit of giving information in a hurry."

"Perhaps, then, you may not know who your correspondent really is," resumed the old gentleman, "and yet you may have such a correspondent. Now, in plain terms, did you not receive a letter the day before yesterday, posted at Gainsborough and addressed to you in just these words—*Mr. Solomon Patch, the Billy Goat, Agar Town, St. Pancras, London*?"

"Well, I did have such a letter," answered the landlord.

"And now, to come to the point at once, will you show me that letter if I give you fifty pounds?"

The old man hesitated for nearly a minute; and then he said, "Before we go any farther, sir, I think I ought to know who you and this young gentleman be——"

"Very well: you shall have that information. Here is my card. William, produce your's."

Deveril did as he was desired; and Solomon, having looked at them both, fixed his eyes on our hero, observing, "Ah, sir—I have seen your name in the newspaper about some duel-business. I hope you've got over your wound?

"You see that I am not suffering very much from it at present," replied Deveril. "And now that you know who we are, I think that you need not hesitate to comply with our wishes."

"I don't mind showing you what I received from Gainsborough two or three days ago," observed Patch: "If so be you promises as how that you won't break open t'other thing what's inside."

"Very good. Here are the fifty pounds" said Mr. Gunthorpe; "and you may produce your letter."

Solomon Patch drew forth an old greasy pocket-book; and from the midst of some papers he produced a letter, which Deveril at once recognised, by the blotch of ink as well as by the handwriting, to be the one he had seen at the post-office at Gainsborough.

"Give me over the money with one hand," said Patch, "and take the letter with t'other. There's nothing like doing things all square and proper."

"Do you think I should cheat you out of your promised reward?" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe, somewhat indignantly. "Here is the money:

The exchange was made; and notwithstanding his servile obsequiousness, Solomon Patch could not avoid showing a low cunning leer of satisfaction upon his countenance as he consigned the bank-notes to his greasy pocket-book.

But Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril did not notice the expression of the man's villanous countenance: for the former was opening the envelope, and the latter was regarding him. That envelope was a blank; but it contained a note marked *Private,* and addressed to Mr. *Chiffin*. Gunthorpe and Deveril at once exchanged looks to imply that they had been taken in; and that though fifty pounds were already gone, they were not a whit wiser than they were before.

"I respect the pledge I gave," said the old gentleman, replacing the note in the envelope: "and I will not open this enclosure without your consent. Now, will you take another fifty pounds for allowing me to do so?"

"It can't be done, sir," responded Solomon Patch. "You see that note is directed to another party: and if I hav'n't had the curiosity to open it myself, I can't suffer you—not by no means whatsomever."

"Who is this Mr. Chiffin?" inquired Gunthorpe.

"Well, sir, he's a genelman which frequents this house, and is a wery good customer of mine. But to tell you the truth, he would prove rather a orkard kind of customer if I was to break open his letters. He hasn't been here for a week or ten days past: and I don't know what's become of him."

At this moment Mrs. Patch opened the door of the bar-parlour, and whispered something in her husband's ear,—having done which, she disappeared again, closing the door behind her.

"Now this is fortunate," observed Solomon. "Mr. Chiffin, the wery highly respectable genelman which this note is addressed to, has just gone into the tap-room. If you like to negotiate with him, I'll introduce him."

"By all means," replied Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Just let me put this letter back again into my pocket-book," said Patch; "and you needn't say a word about the little matter of fifty pounds—'cos why, Mr. Chiffin's rather an eccentric character, and he might take it into his head to cry halves."

"Never fear," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Go and bring the person in."

"Oh, you will find him a wery nice agreeable genelman, and easy to do business with, when there's money in the matter."

Having thus spoken in exalted eulogy of his friend, Solomon Patch issued from the bar-parlour; and as the door closed behind him, Mr. Gunthorpe said to Deveril, "Depend upon it we shall succeed yet. Gold will do anything with such characters as these. But I confess I am rather curious to see this Mr. Chiffin who is in correspondence with the brilliant and splendid Lady Saxondale:"—and the old gentleman uttered these last words with a sneer.

In a few minutes Solomon Patch returned to the bar-parlour, introducing Chiffin the Cannibal. The ruffian was clad in his usual style, with the great shaggy coat—his rough trousers turned up so as to form a hem and leave his heavy boots fully exposed; while his battered white hat, with the rusty black crape, surmounted the most hang-dog countenance that either Mr. Gunthorpe or William Deveril had ever seen in their lives. Chiffin had not shaved for three days and the growth of his black bristly beard was no improvement to a face the villanous grimness of which was enough to frighten any nervous person. He had his club under his arm: and the looks which he threw upon Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril on entering the bar-parlour, were rapid, searching, and suspicious. Mr. Gunthorpe was certainly not prepared to behold such an awful-looking character; and he stared at him in mingled consternation and curiosity; while Deveril shuddered at the suspicion which he entertained from the circumstance of such a ferocious wretch being in correspondence with Lady Saxondale.

"This is Mr. Chiffin," said Solomon Patch closing the door very carefully.

"At your service, gentleman," observed the Cannibal, in his gruff deep voice; but he tried to look as amiable as he could at the moment.

"Sit down, Mr. Chiffin," said the old gentleman, whose object is of course was to be as courteous as he could possibly render himself towards such a bloodthirsty-looking miscreant. "And now help yourself to a glass of wine; for we have a little business to discuss. I suppose the landlord here has told you who we are?

"Yes—and something about a letter," said Chiffin, accepting the two invitations relative to the seat and the wine. "Where is that letter, Sol?"

"Here it is:"—and the landlord produced it from his pocket-book.

Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril watched the fellow's countenance as he opened the note enclosed in the envelope; but its contents were evidently brief enough—for at a glance he scanned them, and then said shortly "Oh! that's it—eh?" at the same time consigning the note to his pocket.

"Now, Mr. Chiffin," said Gunthorpe, "I will come to the point at once. My young friend here happened to be in the post-office at Gainsborough when that letter was posted: and knowing by whose hand it was thus posted, he for certain reasons became anxious to learn what its contents could be—an anxiety wherein I fully share. Will you accept fifty pounds and let us see that note?"

"Make it a hundred," said Chiffin; "and it shall be in your hand in less than a minute?"

"Very well; be it a hundred. Here are two fifty pound notes: but as everything ought to be square," added Gunthorpe, glancing slyly towards Solomon Patch, "you shall take the money with one hand and give me the little billet with the other."

"Ah! I see you get up early enough in the morning," said Chiffin with a chuckle, "and can't be took in easy. Here's is the note."

The exchange was made; and Mr. Gunthorpe opened the billet, Deveril looking over his shoulder. All that it contained were these words:—

"Come down into Lincolnshire in the course of a few days I wish to see you particularly. Every night at eleven o'clock I will look into the chapel to see if you are there."

Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril exchanged looks as much as to ask each other what was to be done now? for they were scarcely any wiser than before, beyond having their suspicion confirmed that Lady Saxondale required the aid of some desperate character, no doubt for the desperate purpose.

"You expect to be well rewarded for whatsoever this may lead to?" said Mr. Gunthorpe after a brief pause, and addressing himself to Chiffin.

"I never tell no tales," responded the Cannibal, "unless it's made worth my while."

"Whatever this lady may offer you as a reward for the business in which she requires you," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "I will give you double if you put us in the way of learning what it is."

"That's speaking plain enough," observed Chiffin; "and I like the proposition so well that it's a bargain. What do you want me to do?"

"From this note, brief though it be, it is evident that you have the means of introducing yourself at will into some chapel——"

"That of Saxondale Castle," interjected Deveril. "The allusion is clearly hereto."

"Yes: all right," said Chiffin. "Go on."

"Well then," continued Mr. Gunthorpe, "if you can introduce yourself into the castle you can no doubt introduce others; and therefore you must render me and Mr. Deveril ear-witnesses of whatsoever takes place between yourself and Lady Saxondale. If you do this, I promise you precisely the double of whatsoever reward she may offer you.

And of course I can take both rewards?" observed Chiffin inquiringly.

"If she pays you beforehand, you can take your reward from her, or not—as you choose. With that we have nothing to do: but although you will faithfully promise at the time to perform whatsoever her ladyship requires, you must leave yourself in our hands."

"And there is to be no such thing as constables, or exposure, or kicking up a row, or anything of that sort?" said Chiffin: "because it would be rather inconvenient for me to get myself into any trouble."

"We shall be quite contented with learning what Lady Saxondale's designs are—and frustrating them if need be," responded Mr. Gunthorpe; and we do not want to give unnecessary publicity to anything."

"Then there's nothing more to be said," observed the Cannibal, "I shall set off into Lincolnshire to-morrow; and I will meet you the day after to-morrow, at any hour or place you like, in the evening."

"Let it be at half-past nine o'clock, and somewhere in the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle," said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"On the bank of the river, and on the north side of the castle, about a mile or two distant from the building. I shall be punctual."

"And so shall we," replied Mr. Gunthorpe, rising from his seat.

He then tossed down a guinea for the benefit of Solomon Patch, who was infinitely delighted that the old gentleman did not allude to the fifty pounds which had been so trickily obtained from him. Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril then issued forth from the boozing-ken, well satisfied to breathe the fresh air once more; for the very atmosphere of that place appeared laden with the pestiferous breath of crime, debauchery, and demoralization,

"What think you now, my dear

sir?" asked William Deverll, as he and Mr. Gunthorpe pursued their way towards the spot where they had left the carriage waiting.

"I can form no other conjecture than that which has already struck us both—that her ladyship, finding the affair in respect to yourself, becoming serious, is resolved to make away with you. But we shall put her to confusion."

"Oh, what a dreahful woman!" exclaimed William, shuddering at the thought. "Yes—my dear sir, it is indeed difficult to arrive at any other conclusion: for this circumstance, following so closely upon the receipt of the letter from her solicitors, is but too well calculated to confirm that belief. Are you not shocked, Mr. Gunthorpe, at the bare idea of a lady of such a proud position, condescending to make use of such instruments as that villain whose company we have just left?"

"Shocked, certainly—but not at all astonished," returned Mr. Gunthorpe, in his own dry blunt manner. "It is all very well for the higher classes to denounce the wickedness and the demoralization of the lower: but in a thousand ways it is the example of the former which creates the crime and vice of the latter. Besides William, you were not so long in Italy without learning that titled ladies make use of bravoes who do the work of murder for gold: and why should it not be so in this country? Depend upon it, there are more crimes committed by the upper classes, or else *at* their instigation than the world is generally inclined to believe. Candidly and frankly speaking, I do not think that upon the face of this earth there is a class more depraved and unscrupulous than the patrician order in England. When I was a young man, and before I went to Italy, I had opportunities of judging of all these things. I belonged to three or four clubs—the first rate and most fashionable ones—yes, and what is more, calling themselves perfectly exclusive. Why, would you believe that half the members of every one of those clubs consisted of mere blacklegs and swindlers, although passing in the world as gentlemen? At this present moment there are at the West End thousands and thousands of scoundrels calling themselves gentlemen, who dress well—some keeping their horses—Some driving their cabs—some having livery-servants—and many living at first-rate hotels: but not one of the whole lot has got an ostensible income. Very often, when they get up in the morning, they do not know how they are going to pay for their dinner, and are compelled to have recourse to frauds and swindlings to replenish their purposes. These *gentlemen*, as they call themselves, would be fearfully indignant if placed under the *surveillance* of the police: and yet they are only a fashionable kind of swellmob after all. Ah! you perceive, William, that I know a little of London life, although I have been absent from my native country for so many, many years."

But this time the carriage was reached. It was a plain brougham, with no other servant besides the coachman: but it was a private equipage, and belonged to Mr. Gunthorpe. On entering the carriage the orders were to drive to Mr. Deveril's residence near the Regent's Park.

"Yes," resumed Mr. Gunthorpe, as he and his young friend were seated together inside the vehicle, which now moved rapidly away—"those who are well acquainted with what is termed fashionable life, will, if they have any respect for themselves, flee from it as from a morass swarming with reptiles—or I should rather say, from a beautiful garden where all is pleasant and agreeable to the eye, but where every flower has its subtle poison and every plant conceals a venomous snake beneath the shade of its foliage. There are of course some bright and remarkable exceptions: there are a few pure lilies and some sweetly blushing roses in that garden, in whose flowers there lurks no venom. Such, for instance, is Florina Staunton."

"Thank you, my dear sir, for making this exception!" said Deveril, in low but enthusiastic terms.

"To be sure! Why should I not? It is the truth. That girl," continued the old gentleman, "is an angel of purity and goodness. I know she is: I read it in her looks the very first moment I met her in the Opera-box. Now I know, William Deverll, that I am a somewhat comical-looking person, and that my appearance is such as to provoke a smile on the part of the silly young creatures and impertinent young coxcombs of fashionable life. But Florina immediately treated me with kindness and respect. She did this out of regard for her uncle the Marquis of Eagledean, by whom I was recommended—and also from the natural excellence of her own heart. She has not been spoilt by the frivolities of the sphere in which she moves; and we will take care that she shall not be, William Deveril," added the old gentleman emphatically.

"I presume, sir, you are in correspondence with the Marquis of Eagledean?"

"You rogue, you!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe, laughing; "do you want to ferret out my secrets? Well, but you shan't, though. Leave everything in my hands: I know very well what I am about—and whatever I promise you, depend upon it I can perform. Have I not told you that Florina shall never marry that contemptible young jackanapes Edmund Saxondale?'

"You have, sir: and you have spoken so confidently——"

"Confidently?" interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe. "It is enough to make one speak confidently—and emphatically too—when one contemplates the bare idea of such a sweet creature as Florina being sacrificed to such a miserable abortion as that Saxondale. But now, I dare say you are longing that I should repeat the assurance I have before given you—that inasmuch as Florina shall not marry Edmund Saxondale, a certain young friend of mine whom I will not more particularly mention, has everything to hope in that quarter."

"Ah! my dear sir, I cannot mistake your allusion," exclaimed Deveril, taking his kind friend's hand and pressing it with grateful warmth. "You know not how happy you render me!"

"Happy!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe. "Of course I want to make you happy. You are a very good young man; I love you as much as if you were my own son—and that is more than I ever told you yet. As for your sister Angela, this must be her last season upon the stage——"

"What do you mean, my dear sir?" cried William, in mingled suspenses and joy.

"I mean exactly what I say. Although I have the sublimest confidence in Angela's purity and virtue, yet it is impossible to leave her longer than can be helped in the atmosphere of a theatre. She must fulfil her present contract with the manager, as a matter of course: but afterwards she shall dance no more in public. You are astonished at what I am saying? Leave it to me to do what I think fit; and in the meantime don't say a word to Angela. Why, you rogue, when I first knew you at Florence, I was more than inclined to put you in a position that should enable Angela to keep off the stage: but I did't know you quite well enough then—and so I thought I would wait awhile till I knew you both better. You don't think that I should be taking all this trouble in different ways on your account, unless I had something like a friendship for you?"

"I am sure, my dear sir," answered Deveril, profoundly moved, "I shall never be able to testify my gratitude——"

"Gratitude!—don't talk to me of gratitude! Have you not always been kind, and respectful, and attentive to me——except, by the bye, when you suffered me to be lugged off before your eyes and tied to a gate. But I don't blame you, William—you could not do otherwise, and besides, I respected you all the more for it afterwards. You showed yourself a brave young man upon the occasion. But about Angela—I suppose you will not be displeased that she should quit the stage?"

"Displeased? Oh! it is my sincerest aspiration!" exclaimed Deveril; "and at one time, when I was succeeding so well with my own avocations previous to the propogation of Lady Saxondale's calumny, I resolved that my sister should not form another engagement at the expiration of her present one. With the two thousand guineas which she will have received by the time it is over, and with my own resources——"

"You thought you could live very comfortably indeed?" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Well, we shall see. Perhaps I may be inclined to add a little to your store: for of course you will not refuse to allow me to do exactly what I choose. I have not forgotten, William Deveril, that when I first knew you at Florence you declined the remuneration I offered for completing Signor Vivaldi's picture; and to speak candidly it was that circumstance which first gave me such a high opinion of you. Depend upon it, the money is bearing good interest for you, in my pocket."

"My dear Mr. Gunthorpe," replied

Deveril, both affected and astonished, —for his worthy friend had never spoken before with so much frankness as to the liberality of his ulterior intentions,—"I do not know——I am at a loss to conceive ——how I have deserved so much goodness at your hands. But I hope you will not fancy that I ever entertained any selfish views when proffering you such little attentions as it was in my power to show?"

"Selfish views?—ridiculous!" ejaculated the old gentleman. "I am not so blind to the true characters of men. But here we are:"—and as he spoke, the carriage stopped in front of Deveril's picturesque little villa.

"You will come in and sup with us?" said our young hero.

"No—not to-night: it is too late. Good bye, my dear boy — good bye:"—and Mr. Gunthorpe shook Deveril warmly by the hands as the latter alighted from the vehicle. To-morrow morning I shall come to you early, to make our arrangements about leaving for Lincolnshire. Once more good night."

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE DANCER AND THE TWO LORDS.

AT the same time that the preceding scene was taking place, the following one was occurring elsewhere.

The elegant drawing-room of Evergreen Villa in the Seven Sister's Road was alighted by the superb lustre suspended from the ceiling; and the beautiful Emily Archer was seated upon the sofa, with Lord Harold Staunton by her side. He had only been announced a few minutes; and as yet the conversations had merely touched upon those ordinary fleeting topics which are too trival to be recorded here. Harold had however learnt that Lord Saxondale might be very shortly expected; and therefore he was anxious to make the most of whatsoever interval remained for him to be alone with Emily.

"Now, my dear girl," he said, "I wish to speak to you very seriously ——"

"What! are you going to make me an offer of marriage?" exclaimed Miss Archer, laughing so as to display her brilliant teeth.

"Perhaps I might do a worse thing than that," replied Harold, in order to flatter her. "But as you say that Saxondale will soon return, do not let us waste time: for I really have important things to talk with you about. In the first place, Emily, do you remember all that affair I told you of concerning Lady Saxondale?"

"What! and the masquerade dress, and so forth?" exclaimed Emily. "To be sure, I do. Edmund and I often talk of it, and have a good laugh over it into the bargain. By the bye, Edmund seems to love his mother amazingly—does he not?"

"You of course mean the very reverse. But tell me, Emily—have you repeated those circumstances to anybody else? Have you gossiped concerning amongst your friends and companions at the Opera? Do speak frankly and truly: for I am most anxious to know."

"No—I have not — upon my honour I have not," replied Emily. "I dot not pretend to be of a very serious or prudent nature: but those were circumstances which, coming to my knowledge in the way they did, I kept to myself."

"You are sure of this? you are certain that you have not inadvertently let drop a word to a soul?" said Harold, with evident eagerness.

"I repeat—and more solemnly still if you wish it—that I have not. I am sure that I have not," added the *danseuse*, emphatically. "But tell me —have you made it up with Lady Saxondale? — for Edmund informed me that you had gone suddenly off upon a visit to the Castle in Lincolnshire."

"Yes:—I have made it up with her —and all things considered, I should be sorry to do her an injury," observed Staunton.

"Then I presume——"

"Presume what you will, my dear girl," interrupted Harold; "but do not waste time in unnecessary remarks. Where is that Spanish dress? You have got it here — I wish you would give it to me."

"Ah!" ejaculated Emily, as a sudden thought struck her: and then she muttered to herself, "To be sure! I have been a fool, with a knowledge of such a secret as this——"

"What are you saying to yourself?" demanded Harold, some slight misgiving springing up in his mind.

"I was thinking," responded Miss Archer, "that I would rather not part with the dress for the moment:"—and there was altogether a change in her manner and her looks, from a mixture of languor and levity, to a mien of seriousness blended with resolute decision.

"Emily, I do not understand you!" ejaculated Harold. "You cannot refuse to do me such a trifling favour? Consider on what terms we have been—how friendly—how intimate——"

"Yes: but I must look out for my own interest," responded Miss Archer. "You have made it up with Lady Saxondale; and you have your own purpose to serve in screening her reputation. It never struck me until just now that by the possession of this secret I may serve my own purposes likewise."

"To be sure!" said the young nobleman. "I did not for a moment think that you would give up the dress without some little consideration. Will you allow me to present you with five hundred guineas?"

"Ah!" again muttered Emily to herself: the thing is indeed serious in their eyes—"very serious, evidently.

"Do tell me what you are saying in this undertone — I cannot hear you. Speak out, Emily. Are not you and I old friends? Come, Saxondale will be returning — and do let us settle this little business at once. Fetch me down the dress, there's a dear girl; and here is the little gift which I have taken the liberty to offer you."

"I thank you, my dear Lord Harold," responded the ballet-dancer, with mock affability, and affecting to bow very courteously: "but I think that the secret I possess, and the truth of which is corroborated by the masquerade-garb, is worth little more than five hundred guineas."

"Nonsense, Emily! What does it prove, after all?

"It proves this" returned the *danseuse*: that there is a certain story come to my knowledge, in which the heroine is a lady who wore a particular dress at a particular ball. Now, suppose inquiries are instituted amongst the West End milliners—can it not be ascertained who made this dress? and can it not be proved that it was made for Lady Saxondale? Thus, even if her son should refuse to corroborate my averment that he found the dress in a box belonging to his mother, the ownership of that dress can be brought home all the same to her ladyship."

"But is it possible, Emily, that your views have taken a mercenary turn?" cried the young nobleman.

"By what right, Lord Harold Staunton," exclaimed Miss Archer, her spirit flaming up, "do you address me in such terms as these? Doubtless *you* have your own selfish interests in wishing to hush up an affair to which at the time you would have scarcely hesitated to give the fullest publicity. Well, then, that secret is worth a fortune to *me*:"—and she looked him full in the face, her large dark eyes expressing the firmest decision.

"Name the sum that you require," said Lord Harold, with difficulty concealing the bitter vexation and spite that he experienced at the turn the affair had taken, and he inwardly cursed his own folly for having given it such an air of importance in the first instance.

"After all that has just taken place between us," replied Emily, in a cold voice, "I do not choose to negotiate with your lordship:"—and as she thus spoke she rose from her seat, as much as to imply that he could take his departure if he chose.

"Come, Emily—do not let us fall out upon the subject," said Staunton. "I did not mean to give utterance to anything offensive—very far from it—I would not do such a thing. Do let us be friends again. Give me your hand Emily."

"No, my lord everything is at an end between you and me. You have spoken insultingly to me — and I resent it. As for the secret which is in my possession, I shall know how to negotiate at headquarters."

"You mean that you will write to Lady Saxondale?" said Lord Harold, visibly perplexed.

"I shall not write to her ladyship: I shall go to her," was the firm response.

"But you will offend Edmnud—you will break with him altogether——"

"What care I?" ejaculated the *danseuse*, disdainfully. "I am already more than disgusted with him—I hate him. Nor do I mind telling you frankly and candidly that the sooner I can rid myself altogether of him, the better. What I shall get from Lady Saxondale for keeping her secret, will be more gained in a day than I should get out of Edmund for a year."

"Ah!" ejaculated Harold: "then your views indeed soar high?

"They are proportionate to the importance of the secret for th knowledge of which I am indebted to *you*:"—and Miss Archer gave an ironical laugh. "Yes," she added, still in the same vein: "and my obligation is still greater to your lordship: for you have taught me the importance of that secret which I had all along regarded as being of no more value than any other piece of gossip or scandal."

"Now, Emily, once for all listen to me," said Harold, feeling that his position was an awkward one. "I have the command of some little money at present: and if you will state your terms, I shall perhaps be enabled to meet them — which will save you a journey into Lincolnshire, besides the unpleasantness of such a negotiation personally conducted."

"You must indeed be very rich all of a sudden, my lord," responded Emily, "if you can meet my terms, as you phrase it. Perhaps you have five thousand pounds at your banker's?"

"Am I to understand, Miss Archer," asked Lord Harold, almost aghast, "that you entertain such an exorbitant notion?"

"Why all this trifling? wherefore exchange so many words?" cried the *danseuse*. "Have I not given you to understand, as pointedly though as politely as I could, that I wished to be alone? But if you require a positive answer from me, I will tell you at once that my terms are five thousand pounds.

"In three days you shall have the money, Emily," answered Harold. "Will you give me up the dress at once, if I present you with a thousand guineas now, and my note of hand payable at three days' sight for the remainder?"

"No—assuredly not," responded Emily: then with a look of malicious mockery, she said, "Ah! my lord, I have overreached you. I have made you avow that the secret is worth five thousand guineas; but I mean to have ten. Lady Saxondale will not hesitate to silence my lips with that amount. And now, my lord, I wish you good evening."

As the *danseuse* thus spoke, she rang the bell: and Lord Harold, perceiving how useless it was to remain arguing the point, and into what monstrous blunders he had fallen from first to last, bowed distantly and withdrew.

He had his cabriolet waiting for him in front of the house: and he was about to enter it, when he bethought himself of a plan which at the very first glance seemed feasible. In less than a minute did he revolve it in his mind: and the result was a determination to carry it out. He ordered his servant to drive away with the cabriolet, and wait for him at the bottom of the road; and when the vehicle had departed, Lord Harold posted himself at a little distance from the garden-gate of Evergreen Villa — so that he could watch the premises without being observed by any one who should arrive there. He had not been in his place of concealment many minutes, when a hired cab drove up to the gate; and in the clear star-light Lord Harold recognized Edmund Saxondale in the individual who alighted. He waited till he saw him enter the villa, and then, opening the garden-gate as noiselessly as possible, he stole round to the back part of the house. Through the kitchen-window he perceived the cook, the housemaid, and the *soubrette*, seated together at supper,—the groom and coachman not living in the house. Now, from certain antecedent circumstances, it was well-known to these domestics that Lord Harold had been on very intimate terms with Miss Emily Archer: and they therefore were not particularly surprised when they saw him enter the kitchen and place his finger to his lip, as much as to imply that they were to be silent. Then, beckoning the *soubrette* out into the back garden, he thrust a few guineas into her hand, saying. "You must manage to get me stealthily upstairs to your mistress's chamber."

"But his lordship is here," responded the young lady's maid, though not refusing to take the money.

"I know it, my dear girl," replied Harold, tapping her upon the cheek. "I met him just now in the road, and he told me that he was only going to stay half-an-hour. You know very well it is alright. So do not hesitate."

"Oh, I am sure that I have no objection, my lord!" rejoined the *soubrette*; "and one thing is very certain—that missus likes you infinitely better than Lord Saxondale. She has told me so a hundred times over."

"Of course—I know it well. And now do not delay; but contrive to introduce me as stealthily as you can," urged the nobleman.

"Come then," said the *soubrette*, who delighted in being the confidante of an intrigue. You will have to pass through the kitchen, you know."

"Never fear. The other servants will not tell his lordship," added Staunton, affecting to laugh merrily, as if it were a capital joke. "Besides, I shall put a golden seal upon each of their lips as I pass through."

"Ah! you put seals on lips, my lord?" said the *soubrette*, surveying him archly.

"Yes—like this," he replied, throwing his arm round her waist and kissing her.

"O fie, my lord—I did not mean that," said the girl; yet it was precisely what she did mean, and what she sought: then, as she arranged her coquettish cap, she added, "Come quickly, since so it is to be."

She now led the way back again into the kitchen, where Harold threw a sovereign into the lap of the housemaid and another into that of the cook, both of whom were highly delighted at this proof of his generosity. The *soubrette* conducted him cautiously up the stairs: and as they passed the drawing-room door on the first landing, it struck them both that high words were being exchanged between Edmund Saxondale and Miss Archer. In consequence of this altercation there was all the less chance of his footsteps being overheard; and he was safely escorted by the *soubrette* to the exquisitely furnished chamber of the *danseuse*. There the wax-candles were lighted; and Harold, seating himself on an ottoman at the foot of the bed, said in a whispering voice, "I can make myself comfortable here for the present."

The *soubrette* threw upon him a wicked look, and issued from the room. The moment Harold was alone, he commenced a search in all Miss Archer's boxes, drawer's, and cupboards, for the masquerade dress, — treading however upon tiptoe as lightly as he could, and conducting his proceedings as noiselessly as possible.

Meanwhile what was taking place in the drawing-room? The reader is well aware that Edmund Saxondale possessed a very bad temper — one of those tempers, indeed, that may be described as of a nasty spiteful kind; and if ever he had anything to annoy him, he was accustomed to vent his wrath upon the first person that he thought he might make his victim in this respect. Now, he had been dining with three or four dissipated young men at an hotel at the West End; and happening to have a few words of dispute with one of them, he had been insulted in a manner which were he possessed of proper spirit, he would have resented signally. But not having the courage to risk a duel, he had quitted the company in a pet—had thrown himself into a cab—and in an execrable temper, had reached Evergreen Villa.

On entering the drawing-room where Emily was seated, he at once said, "Well, I do think you might show a little more pleasure at seeing me."

"What do you mean?" demanded the *danseuse*, who, having made up her mind to break with Lord Saxondale, was neither in a mood to put up with his ill-humour, nor yet altogether displeased at finding a motive ready made for quarrelling. "Do you suppose that I am going to rush from the sofa and throw myself into your arms?"

"At all events, you needn't treat me so cool as you do. What the deuce do I have a mistress for, unless it is to make herself agreeable?"

"And pray what do I honour you with my favour for, unless it is that you are to make yourself agreeable to me?"

"Why, you ungrateful minx, you!" ejaculated Saxondale: "I have done everything for you. What did you possess when I took you from that beggarly Mr. Walter? how much were your jewels worth? how was your house furnished? what sort of an equipage had you? how much money did he allow you?"

"You mean paltry fellow," cried Emily, her handsome countenance flushing with an anger that was utterly unfeigned; "how dare you reproach me with those gifts which I so richly deserve? Why, there are plenty of young men who would be rejoiced to ruin themselves for such as I am. An actress or a *danseuse* has not established her fame till she has sent half-a-dozen lovers into the Bench or through the Insolvents' Court.

"Well, I can tell you very candidly, I don't mean to ruin myself for you—and so that's all about it. How do I know that you are faithful to me? How do I know, I say?"—and Lord Saxondale looked spitefully at his mistress: for what he had just thrown out as a taunt, rebounded back to his mind with all the violence of a suspicion.

“I am sure,” responded Emily Archer, contemptuously, “I am not going to offer you any proof of my fidelity, even if I could.”

“Because you know that you can’t,” retorted Edmund. “Hah!” he suddenly ejaculated: and stooping down, he picked up a gentleman’s kid glove from the carpet. “This is not your’s, at all events; and I don’t think you can advance it as one of your proofs of fidelity?”

“To be sure not,” replied Emily, with the calmest indifference. “That glove belongs to a better man than you are——although,” she murmured in an undertone, “I *have* quarrelled with him.”

What’s that you are saying?” ejaculated Saxondale, livid with rage. “Who has been to see you while I was out? You promised to remain altogether alone this evening, as you were not going to the Opera——”

“But it appears that I have had a visitor,” retorted Emily, with a malicious smile.

“And who was your visitor?’. demanded Edmund, trembling with rage.

“I owe no account of my actions to you,” was the response, disdainfully given.

Yes—but you do, though,” ejaculated Saxondale, for if I thought you had deceived me and were making a fool of me, you may depend upon it I would not take the thing very easily, But I see how it is—you want to pick a quarrel with me, to drive me out of the house. Perhaps you have got the owner of this glove concealed somewhere? or you are in hopes he will come back to reclaim it? By Jove he suddenly exclaimed. “I have a very great mind to search the whole place from top to bottom.”

“Do so,” said Emily, contemptuously. “But observe, if you find no one, I shall take your suspicions as an outrage leaving no alternative but to break off everything between us.”

“You are trying to prevent me from doing what I threatened,” cried Saxondale, “and therefore I will do it.”

Thus speaking, he seized up a wax-candle from the mantel-piece and rushed out of the room, leaving the door wide open—while Emily, throwing herself upon the sofa, sent forth a merry musical laugh, which reached his ears as he dashed up the staircase.

Almost immediately afterwards the *soubrette* stole into the drawing-room: and bending over her mistress, said with frightened looks, “Good heavens, ma’am, he will be discovered!”

“What do you mean? cried Emily, with unfeigned astonishment.

“Oh you know well enough. Lord Harold——”

“Lord Harold?” echoed the *danseuse*.

“He took his departure before Saxondale came.”

“But he returned—he told me that I was to admit him—he went up-stairs—he is there now——”

“Ah!” ejaculated Emily, the truth instantaneously flashing to her comprehension. “But he will not find it though: for it is in a cupboard downstairs.”

“Find what, ma’am?”

At this moment ejaculations of astonishment and rage, bursting from Saxondale’s lips on the landing above, reached the ears of the *danseuse* and the *soubrette*. For a moment the latter looked dismayed: but the former, bursting out into a hearty fit of laughter, exclaimed, “Oh! this is excellent—this is delicious! Will it not be something to be talked about? Come let us see!”

Meanwhile Lord Saxondale had ascended to the landing above; and thinking that if a lover were concealed in the house, it would not be in Emily’s own chamber, he searched the one immediately behind it. Lord Harold Staunton, hearing him rush so quickly up the stairs, naturally fancied there was something wrong; and not wishing to quarrel with Saxondale at a time when he entertained matrimonial projects in respect to his mother, he thought to escape unperceived while his friend was in the back room, whither he had heard him enter. But just at the moment that Staunton was stealing forth, Saxondale came out again from that room: and they met face to face upon the landing. Then was it that ejaculations of astonishment and rage burst forth from Edmund’s lips: for he was instantaneously struck by what appeared to be the perfidy of his bosom-friend. As for Staunton, he was really thrown quite aback: and his natural effrontery availed him not for the moment.

“This is too bad, Harold” said Lord Saxondale, suddenly experiencing the most fiend-like hate against his former friend, but yet not having the courage to testify his resentment in a manly way.

Before Harold could make up his mind what response to give, Emily Archer, closely followed by the *soubrette* came hurrying up the staircase,—the former laughing right merrily.

"Very well!" exclaimed Saxondale, white with rage: "this is no longer a place for me. Of course, Lord Harold, everything is at an end between us: and as I understand that you have been on a visit to the Castle, I hope that for decency's sake you will not again set foot in my house that will one day be mine."

Having thus spoken, and without waiting for any reply,—indeed, not without a fear that Harold might probably kick him down-stairs,—Lord Saxondale turned abruptly round and sped away with a rapidity which had something ignominious in it, and almost gave him the air of being the injuring party instead of the one who was injured. Neither Harold nor Emily made a movement or uttered a ord to retain him: for the former elt all the awkwardness of his situation, while the latter was perfectly indifferent so far as her late admirer was concerned—and indeed, was not sorry to be quit of him. But so soon as he had disappeared from her view, she suddenly ceased laughing;—and with a dignity which even the most depraved of women can assume at times, she advanced up to Staunton, saying, "You are a detestable villain!"

"Ah! these are harsh terms, Emily!" ejaculated the young nobleman, his countenance becoming suffused with crimson.

"Dare not address me in that familiar style!"—then turning to her *soubrette,* Emily said, extending her arm and pointing towards Harold, "That man is a robber—a lurking thief—a sneaking burglar!"

"By God! Emily, this is more than I can endure!" exclaimed Staunton, all the colour vanishing from his face and leaving it livid pale.

"Yes—you are everything I have described, Begone, my lord!—or as true as I am a living woman, I will give you into custody for felony."

"I will make you repent this," muttered Harold between his teeth, as he passed by the *danseuse* and began descending the stairs.

"*You* will make me repent?" she exclaimed, in mingled mockery and indignation, "Begone, sneaking thief! I defy you!"

Harold Staunton made no retort; but took his departure from Evergreen Villa—crestfallen, discomfited, baffled in every way.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE PHYSICIAN AND HIS NIGHT'S ADVENTURES.

IT was the same night as that on which the incidents of the two preceding chapters occurred, and between eleven and twelve o'clock, that Dr. Ferney was engaged in his dissecting-room. Several apartments in the eminent physician's mansion,—which was situated in Conduit Street, Hanover Square,—have been minutely described in an earlier chapter: but the one to which we are now introducing the reader, was *not* noticed upon that occasion. It had a grim and ghastly appearance, as all dissecting-rooms have; and the atmosphere was damp, raw, and sickly, like that of death. All the *paraphernalia* necessary for anatomical purposes, met the eye;—and the floor, though carefully scoured after each dissection, retained upon its deal boards the ineffaceable marks of the fluids which flow from a corpse.

For some years past Dr. Ferney had seldom prosecuted this branch of his studies—unless indeed under some peculiar circumstances he obtained possession of a "subject." Such was the case on the occasion when we now penetrate into the dissecting-room; and there, by the light of a powerful gas-lamp suspended over the table in the centre, shall we find the medical man engaged in the dissection of a corpse.

It was the body of an elderly female, and was but little decomposed. Nevertheless, there was a certain discolouration of the skin, which the physician had not failed to observe the moment the corpse was drawn forth from the sack by the body-snatchers who had brought it to the house half-an-hour previously. That certain suspicions had entered Dr. Ferney's mind, was evident enough from the peculiar gravity which sat upon his pale pensive countenance: but with the imperturbability characteristic of his profession generally, and of himself in particular, he pursued his work steadily and apart from all excitement. For about an hour did he continue to use the scalpel,—laying open the throat which he carefully examined, and subjected to several tests—likewise the stomach, which he treated in a similar manner. At length he put aside his instruments—washed his hands in a basin that stood ready for the purpose—and all the while seemed to be reflecting profoundly what course he ought to pursue under circumstances of an embarrassing and perplexing nature.

When he had performed his ablutions, he looked at his watch and found it was near one o'clock in the morning. For a moment he hesitated whether to retire to his chamber and postpone till day-time the purpose which he had in view; but he felt that he should not be able to sleep until he had got it off his mind;—and issuing forth from the dissecting-room, he locked the door, putting the key in his pocket. He thence proceeded to his laboratory, where he unlocked a drawer, and taking out a phial with a sealed cork, assured himself that this seal had not been broken, Returning the phial to the drawer, Dr. Ferney now descended the stairs; and taking a latch-key with him, quitted the house. Proceeding to the nearest cab-stand, he entered one of the vehicles, and ordered the driver to take him to John Street, Clerkenwell.

On arriving in the vicinage of Cow Cross, Dr. Ferney alighted from the cab—desired the driver to wait for him—and entering a narrow dark alley, speedily reached that same knacker's yard which Lady Bess had visited when seeking an interview with old Bob Shakerly. This was likewise the individual whom the doctor came to visit. The old man was in bed; and not a glimmering of a light shone forth from any window of the wretched little house which he inhabited close by the gate of his yard. However, Dr. Ferney was resolved not to be disappointed; and he accordingly knocked at the door until a window was opened—a head, with a night-cap on, was thrust out—and Bob Shakerly's voice demanded who was there?

"It is I, Dr. Ferney, I wish to speak to you most particularly."

"Coming, sir—coming in a few minutes," at once responded the old man; and drawing in his head, he closed the window, whence, almost immediately afterwards a light glimmered forth.

In a minute or two steps were heard descending the stairs within. The door was opened—and Bob Shakerly appeared, his scraggy form enveloped in an old dressing-gown, and his dirty cotton nightcap upon his head.

"Walk in, sir. Sorry to keep you waiting. Nothink wrong, I hope? The traps hav'n't got scent of the job?"—and he surveyed the doctor with some degree of anxiety.

"No—nothing of that kind," answered Ferney, as he entered the house.

"That's all right, then," said Shakerly, much relieved. "Walk into this room, sir; it's not over tidy—for as I'm a bachelor, I've got nobody to make things neat and comfortable."

"No apology is necessary," answered the doctor, as he entered a little apartment where everything was dirty to a degree, although it was by no means poor in furniture.

"Sit down, sir—pray sit down:"—and Shakerly placed upon the table the candle which he had held in his hand. "Now, sir, what is it?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions," said the doctor. "Were you present with your men when that corpse was exhumed?"

"To be sure I was. It's very little—as you knows, doctor—that I does in that way now: but when any of my chaps tells me of a chance, why, I don't choose to let it slip through my fingers."

"Well, well," interrupted the physician: "we will not waste words. Did you notice whose name was upon the coffin-lid?"

"I always does," replied Shakerly: "and what's more, I makes a memorandum of it when I comes home, just for the fun of the thing—to see how many stiff 'uns I have had up in my time."

"What is the name of this woman you have brought me to-night?" demanded Ferney.

"Here it be, sir," answered Shakerly, taking out an old well-thumbed dog's-eared book from the table-drawer, and turning over some of the pages. There, sir—you can copy it,—and there's pen, ink, and paper. But is there summut wrong?"

"Nothing that you can have anything to do with," responded the physician, as he copied on a slip of paper the last memorandum that stood on the page open before him. "I suppose you know nothing of the deceased woman herself—who she was—where she lived——"

"Nothink at all, doctor. But of course you can easy find out what you want to know from the parish clerk, the sexton, or the registrar."

"No doubt of it," said the physician. "Thank you—I need not detain you any longer—and here's something for the trouble I have given you."

Thus speaking, Dr. Ferney placed a sovereign upon the table as he rose from his seat: and though Shakerly showed an anxiety to ask him some questions, yet he dared not—for he knew the physician's disposition well, and that if he chose to reveal anything he would do so of his own accord. He accordingly held his peace—lighted the doctor to the door—wished him good night—and ascended to his bed-chamber again, wondering what it could all mean.

"It is strange—most strange!" thought Dr. Ferney, as he retraced his way to the cab; and entering the vehicle, he ordered it to drive to his mansion in Conduit Street.

On alighting at his own door, Dr. Ferney perceived two policemen at a little distance, lifting up a man from the pavement; and the words, "I am not tipsy—I am starving," uttered in tones of deep distress, reached the physician's ears.

Hastily paying the cabman's fare, he hurried up to the spot where the scene was occurring; and found that it was an old man—clothed in rags, and altogether in a most lamentable condition—whom the two officers had just raised from the ground. "What is the matter with you?" inquired Dr. Ferney in a compassionate tone.

"I fear I am dying, sir," replied the old man. "But for God's sake, don't let me be taken to the station or the workhouse! Give me a morsel of food—and perhaps I shall be able to drag myself along somewhere."

"Do you know anything about him?" inquired the doctor of the constables; for with every inclination to assist the wretched object before him, he was well aware of the tricks played by street-impostors.

"No, sir—nothing," replied one of the policemen, to both of whom Dr. Ferney was well known. "We saw him fall down suddenly, and at first thought he was drunk: but it doesn't seem so."

"Well, the poor old man shall not be suffered to perish in the streets," said the physician; "and he seems to have a horror of the only places to which you could take him."

"I have indeed, sir," said the object of the doctor's sympathy. "I have seen somewhat better days; and though brought low, I may call myself respectable. Of course these rags do not seem to confirm my words," he added with a degree of bitterness: "but it is so, nevertheless."

Dr. Ferney saw that the poor old man had really a respectable look, despite his miserable garb; and moreover he spoke like a decently educated person, and in a tone of sincerity, Ferney accordingly directed the policeman to lead him into his house; and opening the door with the latch-key, he gave them admittance. The old man was borne into the dining-room, where he was deposited upon the sofa; and the officers took their departure. The servants had long been in bed: but Dr. Ferney hastened to procure refreshments, which he set before the object of his generosity. A glass of wine aided to revive the unfortunate old man, who poured forth his gratitude, not in the snivelling, whining tones of a canting hypocrite, but with the genuine sincerity of one who felt the immensity of the obligation he owed to a benefactor.

"Come," said the doctor, "you are better now—and a good night's rest will help to restore you. To-morrow you shall tell me a little more about your circumstances; and I will see if anything can be done for you. At all events, you shall not go away in those tatters—nor yet with an empty pocket."

The old man shed tears as the doctor thus addressed him: he endeavoured to speak again, but could not—for he was overpowered by his emotions. Dr Ferney conducted him to a bed-room, and leaving him there, was about to ascend to his own chamber, when a loud and impatient knock at the front door sounded through the dwelling. The physician was by no means unaccustomed to be summoned at any hour in the night; therefore without waiting to let the footman get up and answer the knock, he at once hurried down stairs again and opened the street door.

"Ah, doctor, you are up! So much the better," said the visitor, who was a tall, aristocratic looking man, about thirty-six years of age, and remarkably handsome,—with a noble facial outline of the true Roman type.

A carriage, from which this individual had just alighted, was waiting opposite the door. The horses were splendidly caparisoned—the coachman and two footmen belonging to the equipage, were in handsome liveries—and a coronet appeared above the arms painted on the panels.

"I hope that nothing is amiss, my lord?", said Dr. Ferney, in reply to the vistor's somewhat excited ejaculations.

"Can you come with me at once?" demanded the nobleman, "Her ladyship——"

"Not another word is necessary, my lord. I will come directly:"—and the physician, putting on his hat, followed the nobleman into the carriage, which immediately drove away.

The personage by whose side Dr. Ferney now found himself seated, was the Earl of Castlemaine—a nobleman possessed of great wealth, but reputed to be of somewhat singular character and eccentric habits. He was married, and dwelt with his wife in a spacious and splendid mansion at Kensington. He was several years older than her ladyship, who was not above twenty-three, and of great beauty. They had no children; and it was whispered that they lived somewhat unhappily together. Indeed Dr. Ferney, who was their physician, had every reason to believe that this rumour was based upon truth: for he was well aware that for the last three or four years they had occupied separate chambers. Nevertheless, during the day time they were as much together as husband and wife usually are in the higher circles: that is to say, they took their repasts together—they were occasionally seen riding out in the same carriage—and they likewise appeared together in society. The Earl of Castlemaine was a man of reserved, and even moody disposition,—habitually taciturn, and with a countenance which, though so handsome, was nevertheless inscrutable in its expression: so that in those moments when he appeared gayer than at other times, it was difficult for an observer to determine whether this gaiety were sincere—and in his taciturn moods it was equally impossible to obtain a clue to what was passing in his mind. His habits were regular—his character was reported to be unimpeachable—his servants considered him to be a good master: but amongst persons of his own rank and standing, although he had plenty of acquaintances, he had no friends. That is to say, he did not seek to cultivate the friendship of any one; and the inscrutable singularity of his character prevented others from endeavouring to form a close intimacy with him.

Although it was thus whispered that Lord and Lady Castlemaine lived not together upon the happiest terms, yet no aspersion was thrown on the character of the latter. Her conduct appeared to be marked with the strictest propriety: she never displayed the slightest levity; and though she went into society, yet is rather seemed as if it were in fulfilment of one of the inevitable conditions of her rank and position, than because she had any taste for the frivolous gaieties and hollow pleasures of fashionable life. She never danced—never joined those who were seated at the card tables—but she would play on the piano or the harp, when requested; and accompany either instrument with her voice. She was a beautiful musician, and sang with a delicious sweetness,—in which a kind of melancholy pathos was invariably blended with the harmony of a voice of a perfect *contralto*—but a *contralto* that was clouded as if coming from a throat accustomed to stifle and keep down the gushing emotions of the heart. Her manners, though slightly reserved, and always properly dignified, were affable and unaffected; she was a lady whom everybody possessing a kind heart, could not help liking, and around whom there was a species of mysterious interest, investing her as with a halo.

We have said that Lady Castlemaine was beautiful; and while we are thus introducing her to our readers, we may as well pause for a few minutes longer to describe her more accurately. She was of medium stature, but finely made—uniting richness of proportions with an admirable symmetry. The superb slope and form of her shoulders, the least thing rounded, but not to mar the uprightness of her figure, suited well the fullness of the bust, the contours of which were set off in a noble relief by the thinness of the waist. Her hair was of a dark brown, with perhaps the slightest tinge of auburn in it; so that it shone with a more velvety gloss in the lustre of a drawing-room, or when the sunbeams rested upon it. Her eyes were not large, but dark, and with their natural fires somewhat subdued into softness by the general air of melancholy which pervaded her look. Her nose was quite straight—her mouth small and rich: her chin could not be called rounded, but was just sufficiently elongated to render her countenance a perfect oval. Her teeth were white and faultlessly even; and there was an exceeding beauty and sweetness, though mingled with melancholy, in her smile. There was a certain languor about her at times—yet not the languor of voulptuousness. In the eye of the libertine her beauty might,—on account of this very air of languor, combined with the richness of her charms, —appear to be of a sensuous type: but the closer and more delicate observer could not fail to perceive that this languor on her part was that of a soft pervasive melancholy which influenced her entire being.

We should add to the above explanations, that Priscilla—the Christian name of this lady—had been married about seven years ago to Lord Castlemaine. She had therefore been conducted to the altar when she was only sixteen; and those who knew the Earl and his bride at the time, affirmed that it was entirely a love-match, and that they experienced an undoubted affection for each other. But, as already stated, for the last three or four years a change appeared to have come over one or both of them; and during this interval they had not only occupied distinct chambers, but likewise separate wings of the spacious mansion. What could be the cause of this coolness between a husband and wife whose matrimonial career commenced under such smiling auspices? No one could conjecture: for even in a sphere where the tongue of scandal was ever ready to catch up the faintest whisper of detraction, and give currency to it with exaggerations growing as it passed from lip to lip—yet not an aspersion had been thrown out against the moral purity of Lady Castlemaine. Some had supposed that her husband's temper was of a most unfortunate kind, although he had the good taste and a manly dignity sufficient to conceal it before the world: but others would object that the natural sweetness and amiability of Priscilla's disposition, would lead her to bend and adapt herself to any infirmity of temper on her husband's part. To be brief, no one could satisfactorily account for the coolness subsisting between this couple; and it was supposed that not even the domestics themselves (some of whom had been for years in his lordship's service) could solve the mystery.

The reader has now obtained as great an insight as we are at preseat enabled to afford, into the characters and circumstances of the Earl and Countess of Castlemaine: and it was by the side of this nobleman that Dr. Ferney found himself seated in the carriage at about three o'clock in the morning, he not having been in bed the whole night. For several minutes after they had entered the vehicle, there was a profound silence. The physician could not help feeling, or at least suspecting, that there was something more than usually singular in the Earl's look and manner on coming to fetch him: and this idea was strengthened in his mind when so many minutes elapsed and yet his lordship volunteered no more specific explanation than he had already hinted at as the motive for fetching him. On the other hand, the Earl himself appeared to be buried in profound reverie; and though by the twilight of dawn the doctor could perfectly well discern the countenance of his noble companion,—yet, as usual, he could trace no index to his thoughts upon his handsome but inscrutable countenance.

"How long is it since you saw Lady Castlemaine?" inquired the Earl, at length breaking silence, not abruptly, but in a slow, deep, and measured voice.

"As nearly as I can recollect, my lord, it must have been two months," responded the physician.

"And was it to prescribe for her ladyship then, that you saw her?" asked the nobleman.

"No—I think not, my lord. If you remember, it was you yourself, who were unwell at the time."

"To be sure—I do recollect. Then it is possibly some months—three or four," added the Earl, "since you last visited her ladpship professionally?"

"It must be at least for so long a period as your lordship has named," replied Dr. Ferney.

The Earl of Castlemaine made no farther remark at the moment; but falling back in the carriage, he folded his arms over his breast and appeared to sink into a moody reverie. He was a man of dark complexion, with coal black air, and eyes to match; and thus there was something that might almost be termed terrible in the aspect of that countenance when thus clouded with inscrutable thoughts. The doctor eyed him furtively, and could not help thinking that there was something wrong, and which had caused himself to be thus hurriedly fetched by the Earl in person, and at such an hour. Perhaps any other individual save Dr. Ferney would have put direct queries upon these points—or at least have inquired what ailed her ladyship: but the physician had not the slightest particle of worldly curiosity in his composition—at the same time that his feelings were of so delicate a nature that under such circumstances as the present, he did not even choose to appear inquisitive where no spontaneous explanation was at once volunteered.

The carriage rolled on; and the Earl of Castlemaine continued wrapped up in silence and impenetrable gloom. His brows, which were naturally high arched, were contracted,—thus giving a scowling look to his face; his lips were compressed—and though the nature of his thoughts could not be deciphered, yet was it full evident that it was no agreeable topic on which he was pondering. The doctor, finding that he did not renew the conversation, threw himself back in his corner of the carriage, and gave way to his own reflections. He thought of the discovery he had made in respect to the anatomized corpse—his visit to Bob Shakerly at the knacker's yard—the old man whom he had taken into his house; and he thought likewise, as indeed he often and deeply thought, of that unknown lady whom he had loved so long, and with such a profound, constant, enduring affection!

The horses went quick: and in less than half-an-hour from the moment they had started from the physician's house in Conduit Street, the equipage dashed through the iron gates of the railings fencing the grounds in the midst of which the Earl of Castlemaine's mansion stood. The gas-lamps were still burning beneath the portico; and the moment the vehicle stopped, the hall-porter opened the front-door. Lord Castlemaine alighted, followed by the doctor; and he led the way up a splendid staircase, into a drawing-room where lights were burning.

"Sit down," said the Earl: "for I must speak to you for a few minutes. Her ladyship," he continued, after a brief pause, during which he appeared to nerve himself as it were with an effort to give expression to what he was compelled to say, "was taken ill just now on our return from a party at the Duke of Harcourt's. I do not know that her illness is at all dangerous—I do not think it is:" and his lips curled strangely as he thus spoke—it might be in scorn—it might be with other emotions—but which it was impossible to decide. "At all events, doctor," he continued, "you will soon ascertain: and observe! I desire that you communicate to me the exact truth."

"Wherefore, my lord, should you address me in this manner?" asked the physician, with a certain dignity not unblended with indignation in his looks. 'If you have no faith in me, I cannot consider it an honour that you have called me in upon this occasion."

"My dear Dr. Ferney, you must not be angry with me," said the Earl of Castlemaine, taking the physician's hand and pressing it with more warmth than he was generally accustomed to display. "But perhaps you will understand me better presently. You can now ascend to her ladyship's chamber—you know the way—I shall await you here."

The physician accordingly quitted the drawing-room; and mounting the next flight of stairs, reached a landing whence two long, carpeted, and splendidly decorated corridors branched off—one to the right wing of the building, the other to the left. In the latter, and at the extremity of the corridor leading thither, the Earl of Castlemaine's own private chambers were situated: while precisely at the opposite extremity—namely, in the right wing—was the elegant suite of apartments occupied by her ladyship. Dr. Ferney, who knew the way well, turned into the brilliantly lighted corridor leading to the rooms of the Countess; and passing by some admirable specimens of sculpture—some immense Chinese vases, exhaling perfumes—and some smaller ones filled with flowers, he reached the door of the ante-chamber. Knocking gently, it was immediately opened by the principal lady's-maid of the Countess. She was a woman of about forty—highly respectable—discreet and reserved—not given to gossiping nor scandal—and devotedly attached to her mistress. She was weeping—and, indeed, looked much distressed. The moment the door was opened, the doctor's ear caught wild and delirious cries; and he recognised the voice of Lady Castlemaine.

"Is your mistress very bad, Mrs. Broughton?" inquired Ferney, as he entered the ante-chamber.

"Oh, sir—she is raving. For God's sake, come!"

Mrs. Broughton accordingly led the physician through a sitting-room fitted up with mingled costliness and taste—thence into a boudoir furnished in a still more elegant manner—and thence again into a spacious and handsome bed-chamber, where Lady Castlemaine was sitting upon a sofa, giving vent to those delirious cries which the doctor had heard, and struggling with two of her maids. The elegant apparel which she had worn at the ball. had been torn off her—a morning wrapper enveloped her form—her hair was hanging in disorder over her half-naked shoulders—her face was pale—her features were distorted: there was frenzy in her looks, and delirium in her ravings. But the moment Dr. Ferney made his appearance, she either recognised him, or else became overawed at the presence of a man—and instantaneously ceasing her cries threw herself back upon the sofa.

Dr. Ferney bade the two junior maids retire for the present, while he remained alone with Lady Castlemaine and Mrs. Broughton. Then he spoke in soothing tones to her ladyship: but she did not appear to comprehend him. She gazed in a sort of vacant wildness upon his countenance for several minutes: then suddenly placing her hands before her eyes, she gave a subdued shriek and sank back insensible. The proper restoratives were administered; and when the Countess was returning to herself, the other maids were summoned from the adjoining apartment to convey her to her couch. Scarcely however was she deposited in the bed, when the ravings of her delirium broke forth anew: and Dr. Ferney wrote a prescription which he desired might be sent off to the nearest chemist's at once. The two junior maids were again dismissed from the room; and when they had retired, Dr. Ferney, taking advantage of a temporary lull on the unfortunate lady's part, said, "Tell me, Mrs. Broughton, how all this came about."

"My lord and her ladyship," replied the woman, scarcely able to subdue her sobs as she spoke, "returned home at about a quarter to two o'clock, from Harcourt House; but the moment her ladyship alighted from the carriage, she was seized with a fainting fit—and his lordship taking her in his arms, bore her upstairs to this chamber. I and the other maids, not hearing the carriage arrive, were not immediately in attendance. But I was the first to come hither; and I found his lordship tearing off my lady's apparel to give her air."——Here Mrs. Broughton hesitated for a few moments, and then added in a low voice and with hesitating manner. "Soon afterwards his lordship suddenly broke away, saying that he would fetch the doctor: and then, sir, he went for you."

"I understand," observed the physician.

Some more conversation took place between himself and Mrs. Broughton, but which we need not lay before the reader. In half-an-hour the medicine for which he had sent, was brought: but in the meantime the delirium of the Countess had broken forth anew—and it was with some difficulty that she could be forced to take the composing draught. At length however it was poured down her throat; and in a few minutes its effects became visible in the lull of her excited mind which followed.

The physician remained with her ladyship for another half-hour, and having given Mrs. Broughton certain requisite instructions, he quitted the sick chamber, promising to return again by noon. He then descended to the drawing room, where he had left the Earl of Castlemaine, and whom he found walking to and fro, with his arms folded across his chest, and his looks bent down. He did not immediately perceive the physician: for the room was spacious, and the door opened noiselessly. The doctor accosted him; and the Earl, stopping suddenly short, bent upon him a look which, with all the power of his piercing dark eyes, seemed to search into his very soul.

"Dr. Ferney, what is the matter with her ladyship?" he demanded, in a deep hollow voice—so changed indeed from its natural tones, that if the physician had heard it in the dark, he would not have recognized it.

"Her ladyship is exceedingly ill, was the response rendered by Ferney; "and must be kept as quiet as possible. I have given Mrs. Broughton the fullest instructions——"

"But what is it?" exclaimed the Earl now manifesting impatience.

"I hope and trust," answered the physician "that her ladyship will in a few hours become composed and regain the powers of her intellect. But I charge your lordship to avoid anything that may excite her. If this advice be not attended to, I will not answer for her reason—no, nor yet for her life. She is in a more dangerous state than your lordship ere now appeared to imagine."

"But what is it, I again ask?" ejaculated the Earl; and an indescribable expression, which had something demoniac in it, passed convulsively over his dark countenance.

"Her ladyship," responded the physician, who evidently trembled lest the announcement he had to make should not be a pleasant one—or rather he had the certainty that it would not,—"her ladyship is in a way to become a mother."

"Ah, I thought so! Enough, doctor:" —and the Earl of Castlemaine instantaneously became sternly and unnaturally cold. "Of course you will come and see her soon again?"

"I have intimated to Mrs. Broughton that I shall return about noon: but if any threatening symptoms should arise, I must at once be sent for."

"No doubt, doctor," responded the Earl, who was still cold, severe, and ominously implacable. "I have ordered my carriage to wait to convey you home."

Dr. Ferney then took his leave; and entering the vehicle, was speedily whirled back to his own mansion. But during the ride thither, he reflected sorrowfully and with apprehension, upon the circumstances of the case which had thus required his presence.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE TITLED LADY AND THE OPERA-DANCER.

It was about noon — on the day following the evening of Harold Staunton's interview with Emily Archer at Evergreen Villa—that Lady Saxondale was walking by herself along the Bank of the Trent at a short distance from the castle. She was pondering upon many subjects, few if any of which were very pleasurable—and least of all the one for which she had specially despatched Lord Harold Staunton to London. Her ladyship could not blind her eyes to the fact that within the last few weeks the aspect of her affairs had become most threatening: the sky of her destiny had grown suddenly overcast — and from every quarter did the storm of calamities threaten to burst forth. Within this interval a new crime had been perpetrated, which weighed upon her conscience notwithstanding that iron resolution of soul which she possessed, and which often rose superior even to the qualms of the secret monitor within. And then, too, she had fallen from that pedestal of female honour and chastity upon which, since her husband's death nineteen years back, she had stood so proudly. Yes —she had fallen in a manner but little calculated to mitigate the sense of self-degradation! Had she fallen to throw herself into the arms of him whom she loved—the arms of William Deveril—it would have been different: but she had fallen, only to sink into the embrace of one whom she hated—Lord Harold Staunton! This was a fall, therefore, accompanied by utter humiliation; and though she was inspired not by any true principal of virtue, yet her pride was deeply wounded. She felt that she was sacrificed to terrorism, and not to love: she had yielded herself up to expediency, and not to passion, and these reflections were accompanied by a profound sense of self-loathing.

And now too, she asked herself if Lord Harold's mission should fail, what course was she to adopt? It was but too evident that Mr. Gunthorpe was resolved, on Deveril's part, to pursue extreme measures. Oh! how she hated that Mr. Gunthorpe, how bitterly—deeply—cordially, did she hate him! How she would have rejoiced to be enabled to inflict upon him some direful vengeance! Again, too, she could not help thinking that there had been something singular in Florina's conduct towards her for the last two or three days:—nothing very pointed —no overt display of aversion or pique —but a certain cold reserve, the cause of which her ladyship could not conjecture. Nay, more — the experienced eye of Lady Saxondale had even discerned an inward struggling on Florina's part, to conceal, if not to conquer, that coldness—but without success. It was evident therefore that the young damsel had learnt something concerning her: or was it mere vexation, because Lady Saxondale had exposed William Deveril amongst all her fashionable acquaintances? No; this could scarcely be the solution of Florina's coldness: for the young maiden's demeanour towards her ladyship, had not been that of an uniform reserve ever since the first day when Lady Saxondale told her story of Deveril's alleged impropriety: but it was a change of conduct that Florina had manifested only within the past two or three days.

Altogether, Lady Saxondale's reflections were very far from being of an agreeable character, as she took her rambles along the bank of the river. She had come forth alone, for the purpose of communing with herself. Mr. Hawkshaw was with Juliana and Florina in the garden: Lady Macdonald had remained in-doors to read her books or amuse herself with her knitting: and thus there was no one to intrude upon her ladyship's solitary walk.

It was noon, we said: and the patrician lady had rambled to a distance of about a mile from the castle, when she was suddenly aroused from her reverie by the noise of an approaching equipage; and looking towards the road, she perceived a post-chaise hastening in the direction of the mansion. It was evident that she herself was observed and recognised by the occupant of that chaise, who thrusting his head out of the window, ordered the postilion to stop. He then quickly alighted; and Lady Saxondale at once saw that it was Lord Harold Staunton.

Her first thought was one of joy and satisfaction, — believing that he had successfully accomplished his mission: but her second reflection was the very reverse—for it struck her that as he approached, there was nothing reassuring upon his countenance.

"Have you succeeded?" she at once said, without a single word of a prefactory greeting: "tell me, have you succeeded?"

"I am compelled to say that I have not," he replied. "I have travelled post since the middle of the night——"

"Then you have very disagreeable intelligence for me?" interrupted her ladyship becoming pale, and gazing fixedly and searchingly upon Harold's countenance. "Speak! — you must of course perceive how useless—indeed, how worse than useless it will be to mislead me."

"I have no such intention," responded Staunton, somewhat sharply. "Does not the speed with which I have travelled sufficiently prove that I consider your interests identical with my own?"

"Then, without more words, explain what has happened."

"You may expect a visit from Emily Archer——"

"The dancing-girl — Edmund's mistress!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, with mingled excitement and disdain.

"Yes: and if I mistake not, she will be here this evening. But rest assured, Harriet," continued Staunton, "that it is through no understanding with me nor any arrangement on my part, that she is coming."

"Then you must have managed matters very badly," rejoined Lady Saxondale; "and the promises you held out of settling this business, have proved delusive enough."

I could not foresee the turn that things would take," answered Staunton. "I did my best. Of Alfred, my valet, we can make sure; and there is one thing satisfactory in respect to Emily Archer—that she has not gossiped upon the subject. But she is mercenary as a Jewess, and is resolved to extort a much larger sum than I could possibly have anticipated."

"And wherefore could you not write to me upon the subject? why not keep her in London until you received fresh remittances from me?" demanded Lady Saxondale impatiently.

"The girl showed a spirit for which I was not prepared—and she demanded no less than a sum than—But I shall frighten you with the amount."

"Name it—name it!" cried her ladyship.

"Ten thousand pounds."

Lady Saxondale stopped short in the stupor of amazement.

"Yes—such is her exorbitance," continued Lord Harold: then in a tone of increased vexation, he added, "Altogether my visit to her was an unfortunate one. She would not negotiate with me, but declared that she would come direct to you. I thought that if I could procure possession of the masquerade-dress we might defy her—

or at least bring her more easily to terms. I accordingly contrived to steal up to her chamber, where I searched for the dress. I was unsuccessful. By some means or another, Edmund's suspicions were excited that there was a rival in the house; and he discovered me in that chamber. There was an explosion—a quarrel——"

"Ah! you have quarrelled with Edmund?" said Lady Saxondale.

"Yes—and he bade me observe that for decency's sake I was never again to set foot within either the town-mansion or the Lincolnshire castle. And now you know everything."

Lady Saxondale made no immediate response, but reflected deeply for several minutes. If the aspect of her affairs had seemed perplexing previous to Lord Harold's return, it now appeared ten thousand times more threatening. What was she to do? how was she to act? The circumstances in which she was placed required leisure for the most serious meditation.

"You had better return to the chaise and proceed on to the castle," she at length said to her companion. "No one there need know that you alighted to speak to me; and when we meet presently, it will be as if I were previously unaware of your return."

"Perhaps we shall not have another opportunity of conversing alone together, ere you receive Emily Archer's threatened visit."

"We can decide upon nothing till I *have* seen her," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "It will be time enough *then* to deliberate upon the course that is to be pursued."

"You are cold—distant—reserved, Harriet," said Staunton.

"How would you have me be towards you?" demanded Lady Saxondale, still speaking in a glacial voice: then, as her tones suddenly changed into mocking accents, and as a smile of withering irony writhed her lips, she said, "I imagine that if the explosure which we have been trying to ward off, should take place—if William Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe should pursue their law-process and overwhelm me with shame and dishonour,—I suppose, Lord Harold, that you will not then be so very anxious to accompany me to the altar?"

"What have you to fear if Emily Archer can be licensed?" asked Staunton not giving a direct reply to the question so homely put.

"But think you that I will submit to the extortions of that woman?" exclaimed her ladyship, with fire flashing from her eyes. "What? ten thousand pounds! and who knows but that she will double the amount of her demands when she finds that I yield to her first stipulation? No—Emily Archer must be dealt within some other way. And now return to your chaise. It is useless to prolong the discourse at present."

With these words Lady Saxondale turned abruptly round, and began retracing her steps towards the castle. Lord Harold Staunton stood irresolute for nearly a minute; and he was half inclined to rejoin her ladyship and seek an explanation of those ominous words to which she had just given utterance. But with a cold shudder he feared to have their meaning completely cleared up; and therefore hurried back to the chaise, which quickly conveyed him on to the castle.

As he alighted at the entrance-gates, he met his sister Florina, who had discreetly left Juliana and Mr. Hawkshaw to walk by themselves in the garden, knowing that the latter was paying his court to the former.

"Ah Flo!" said Harold in the usual careless, indifferent manner with which he was accustomed to treat his sister, "Lounging about by yourself —eh?"

"You have returned unexpectedly, have you not?" inquired Florina, with a look of somewhat anxious scrutiny at her brother's appearance, which sufficiently indicated that he had not been in bed all night.

"Oh! I was desirous to get back," he answered, assuming an off-hand manner. "You know, when I went away I promised to rejoin you as soon as possible. But you look strange, Florina? Has anything happened? What is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing," replied the young damsel. "You seem as if you required rest,—you have doubtless, travelled all night——"

"Yes—I shall go and lie down for an hour or two:"—and thus speaking Lord Harold Staunton hastened into the castle.

"Oh, my poor unhappy brother!" murmured Florina to herself, as she turned abruptly away and proceeded along the bank of the river. "What will become of you, if you are indeed, as I suspect, by some means ensnared in the meshes of Lady Saxondale?"

Hours passed away—evening came—

and the company at the castle assemhled at the dinner-table. Mr. Hawkshaw had been invited to remain: aud he of course sat next to Juliana, towards whom his attentions were so marked that Lord Harold Staunton had no difficulty in perceiving he was paying his court to her. Lady Saxondale did the honours of the table with her wonted display of good-breeding: and it would have been difficult for a casual observer to discern the agitation of a troubled soul beneath that external self-possession. Florina was silent and pensive: for not even Deveril's parting injunction, that she was to dissemble for a short period the unpleasant thoughts which his revelations had excited in her mind, could lead the young damsel so far to play the hypocrite as to appear joyous or gay when she receiving the hospitality of a woman whom she alike dreaded and loathed, and while she was trembling for the welfare of a brother whom she knew to be ensnared in that designing woman's trammels.

After dinner the whole party descended into the garden, where they soon divided themselves into couples —Juliana and Mr. Hawkshaw pairing off into one avenue—Lady Macdonald and Florina into another—and Lord Harold Staunton remaining alone with Lady Saxondale. But scarcely had the two last-mentioned thus found themselves together—and ere a single syllable of any consequence had passed between them —the sounds of a travelling equipage dashing up to the castle, but concealed from their view by the trees reached their ears.

"This is doubtless the Opera-dancer," said Lady Saxondale. "If so, I shall see her alone. Do not attempt to make your appearance: for after all you have told me, I question whether she would be over well pleased to meet you."

"But what course do you purpose to adopt?" inquired Harold, gazing earnestly upon Lady Saxondale's countenance.

"I must be entirely guided by circumstances," rejoined her ladyship.

A domestic now made his appearance, with the intimation that a lady, who had just arrived in a post-chaise, sought an immediate interview with the mistress of the castle.

"Did she give her card or name?" asked Lady Saxondale, with perfect self-possession.

"No, my lady," returned the domestic. "She said that as she was unknown to your ladyship, it was useless to do so."

"I will see her," said Lady Saxondale; and she accordingly re-entered the castle, the footman indicating the apartment to which the visitress had been shown

As the door was thrown open and Lady Saxondale crossed the threshold of that room, she armed herself with all her patrician dignity—invested herself with all her haughty pride; and drawn up to her full height—stately as a queen, yet elegant and graceful in all her movements—she accosted the visitress, who rose from the seat which she had taken. At a glance Lady Sexondale scanned her from head to foot. She saw that she was handsome—that she was dressed with more magnificence than taste—and likewise that she possessed a hardihood and an effrontery well calculated for the business upon which she had come. Indeed, the spirit of the visitress was such as to prevent her from experiencing the slightest embarrassment on finding herself in the presence of the haughty and brilliant Lady Saxondale, whom however she regarded with some little degree of curiosity; for though she had occasionally seen her in her box at the Opera, and also in her carriage in the park, yet this was the first time that she had ever looked her face to face.

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?" inquired her ladyship, with a cold politeness, and seeming as if she entertained not the slightest idea of who her visitress was.

"Perhaps your ladyship may have heard of Mademoiselle D'Alembert?"

"No, never—at least not to my present recollection," responded Lady Saxondale, pretending to reflect, as if she were taxing her memory: and still by remaining standing, she sought to keep the *danseuse* standing likewise.

"And yet I have seen your ladyship at the Italian Opera," resumed Miss Archer, whose pride was hurt at the thought of her name being so utterly unknown to Lady Saxondale.

"It may be so: but one of course does not know everybody who frequents places of public amusement."

"Our conversation is likly to be a long one," said Emily: "and as I am fatigued with travelling by railway and by postchaise, you will permit me to be seated:"—saying which, she deposited herself in a free and easy manner upon a sofa, and unfastened the ribbons of her bonnet to give herself air—for the evening was close and sultry.

"Now perhaps," observed Lady Saxondale, likewise taking a seat, but with a cold, distant, formal air, as if to rebuke the familiarity which her visitress seemed inclined to display,—"Now perhaps, you will have the goodness to inform me for what purpose you have sought this interview."

"Does your ladyship really mean me to understand," exclaimed Emily, "that my name is unknown to you? Well, of that no matter. I will speedily explain who I am. At the Italian Opera I am Mademoiselle D'Alembert—where I condescend to dance, apparently for the diversion of such as your ladyship who lounge in the boxes, but in reality because it suits my whim and gratifies my pride. But at my own house, Evergreen Villa—where I live in excellent style—my name is Miss Archer and it is as Miss Archer that I now introduce myself to your ladyship. I may add that your son Lord Saxondale has recently been a very intimate friend of mine—until last night, when I picked a quarrel with him for the express purpose of causing a lasting breach between us. A certain Lord Harold Staunton," pursued Emily, with a significant and half-malicious smile, "who I believe is well known to your ladyship, can explain these particulars the next time you see him."

The *danseuse* delivered herself of this speech in a sort of half flippant, half familiar manner, which stirred the proud soul of Lady Saxondale to its nethermost depths; and she looked coldly stern and supremely haughty as she bent her gaze upon Miss Archer.

"You have introduced yourself, it is true," said her ladyship: "but the object of your visit is as yet unexplained."

"It is really difficult for me to believe that your ladyship has no suspicion of the object of my visit," resumed Emily: "but if it be so, explanations are easily given. In short, your ladyship has only to reflect whether there be anything at all peculiar in respect to yourself and Lord Harold Staunton, in order to arrive at a complete idea of my purpose."

"You are speaking in a manner which is almost sufficient to induce me to order you from my presence.'

"No—your ladyship will do nothing of the kind," was Emily Archer's cool response. "I can read the human countenance well enough; and at this moment while I am addressing you, there is a certain trouble in your's — though I must confess that it would escape the notice of any one who was not a very close observer. Now, in plain terms," continued Miss Archer, "I am confident that you *do* know that Lord Harold Staunton called upon me last night in London and made certain proposals to me. He offered me monies which could not have possibly been his own, and which you must have therefore placed in his hands—or at least promised to furnish for a particular purpose."

Lady Saxondale bit her lip with a vexation which she could not possibly control. She had endeavoured to overawe the *danseuse*—to brow-beat her—to reduce her, in short, to that state of submission in which it would be comparatively easy to dictate her own terms, instead of having terms dictated to herself. But in this aim she was frustrated by the cool self-possession — we might almost say the impudent effrontery, of Mademoiselle D' Alembert: and therefore her ladyship perceived it to be necessary to go upon quite another tack.

"Will you, in a few words," she said, "tell me precisely what you demand? There need be no farther explanation between us in the form of preface or prelude. I am well aware —indeed I do not attempt to deny, that there is some foolish and absurd scandal existing against me in certain quarters; and unfortunately my own son has, in his natural thoughtlessness, given encouragement to it. It were easy for me to ridicule the scandal and scorn the scandalmongers; but the world is so wicked, that it is not always prudent to make light of such matters; and therefore, if your stipulations be at all reasonable, I do not know that I shall refuse to accede to them."

"I require ten thousand pounds." replied Emily Archer; "on which condition I will give up a certain dress that I have in my possession."

"Your terms are exceedingly high, Miss Archer," responded Lady Saxondale: "although, as a matter of course, the sum you have named is but a trifling one to me."

"Oh! in that case," exclaimed the *danseuse*, "I cannot consent to bate one farthing: and indeed your ladyship ought to be very much obliged to me for not doubling the amount of my demand."

"Were you to hint at such a thing," rejoined her ladyship, "I would close the negotiations at once. But so far as ten thousand pounds go, I will offer no objection. You have the dress with you, you say."

"It is in the post-chaise which has brought me hither from Lincoln. My maid, who accompanied me, has it in charge."

"You must be well aware, Miss Archer," resumed Lady Saxondale, that I have not so large a sum as ten thousand pounds in the castle at this moment."

"Your ladyship's cheque upon your London banker will fully answer the purpose," observed the *danseuse*.

"That I cannot give. My bankers would be surprised at my drawing so large a draught in favour of a young lady engaged at the Opera. It would be immediately believed that I was encouraging my son in a certain course to which I will no farther allude. To-morrow I can procure the money in notes and gold from my banker at Gainsborough; and therefore," continued her ladyship, "if you do not mind waiting in Lincolnshire until to-morrow evening——"

"Oh! I have not the slightest objection," exclaimed Emily. "It will suit me well. I will return at once to Lincoln. Name your own hour, Lady Saxondale when I can meet you here to-morrow."

"You cannot be at all surprised if I adopt some — as I think, necessary— Precaution in respect to this second interview which must take place."

"Stipulate your own conditions: they shall be attended to."

"Lady Saxondale appeared to reflect for some minutes: nnd then she said, "It must be at a somewhat late hour to-morrow evening when our interview takes place; and it cannot be within the castle-walls. I should be exposed to a thousand disagreeable suspicions if you were to visit me here again. As it is, I shall have to invent some excuse to account for your present appearance here. Do you think, however, that your maid—whom you say you have with you in your chaise—is likely to gossip with my domestics?"

"I am convinced she will not, my lady. I gave no name on my arrival; and therefore you may recognise every inclination on my part to conduct this negotiation with as much delicacy as possible. In the first place, my servant does not know the object of my coming, nor what the masquerade-dress we have brought with us has to do with my visit; and in the second place, she will not mention my name to your servants, even if they speak to her while she waits in the chaise."

"I thank you, Miss Archer, for these assurances," resumed Lady Saxondale, whose tone and look had gradually been displaying more affability and condescension since that point in the discourse at which she went off on her new tack. "I am now better able to suggest the requisite arrangements for our interview of to-morrow evening. In the first place, you must remove to-morrow from Lincoln to Gainsborough. This latter town is but a few miles distant from the Castle; and there is a pleasant walk along the bank of the river. so, that without even inquiring your way you cannot possibly mistake it. Will you to-morrow evening—say at about half-past nine o'clock meet me on the bank of the river midway between Gainsborough and the castle?—and the matter can be settled at once. I shall come provided with the money: you on your part will have the masquerade-dress."

"But your ladyship has no objection that I should be accompanied by my maid?"

"Not the slightest—on condition that you do not tell her whom it is that you are to meet: for however trustworthy you may consider her, I by no means wish to place myself in her power."

"May she not recognise your ladyship?"

"Not through the dark veil that I shall wear—nor in the disguise that I shall adopt in my apparel altogether,"

"But are there no other means, Lady Saxondale." inquired Emily Archer, not altogether relishing the extreme mystery of the arrangement, "by which the negotiation can be completed? If, for instance I were to meet you at Gainsborough to-morrow when you visit your banker——"

"No, Miss Archer—I am so well known at Gainsborough that I cannot risk being talked about. Unless indeed the whole affair be managed with the utmost secrecy, it will not be worth my while to give one single shilling to seal your lips."

"Then be it as your ladyship has decided," rejoined Emily. "For my part I do not object to whatsoever precautions your ladyship chooses to take."

"You must understand that they are indispensably necessary," said Lady Saxondale. "But one word more. If you maintain the strictest secrecy in respect to all these proceedings—and if at the end of a year from the present time you have kept in your own bosom whatsoever you know concerning my affairs—you may present yourself again to me, and I will give you five thousand pounds more as a final and closing reward."

"Your ladyship may depend upon me," exclaimed Emily, scarcely able to conceal her joy at these golden results of her negotiation.

She then rose to take her leave—first however advancing, up to one of the splendid mirrors in the apartment, and trying the strings of her coquettish French a bonnet: then with a theatrical curtsey, which made the ample folds of her rich satin dress swell out like a baloon all round her, Mademoiselle D'Alembert quitted the apartment. She descended to the postchaise which was waiting; and taking her seat inside the vehicle, from which her attendant *soubrette* had not alighted, was speedily on her way back again to Lincoln.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE THOROUGH-BRED.

On the following day Mr. Hawkshah arrived to lunch at Saxondale Castle, shortly after one o'clock, according to invitation given him by the lady of the mansion herself ere he took his departure on the previous evening. He came on a most splendid thorough bred horse, of which he had spoken the day before, and concerning which Lord Harold had expressed some degree of curiosity. During luncheon, Staunton renewed the conversation relative to the horse; and Mr. Hawkshah launched forth into enthusiastic eulogies of its brilliant qualities,—at the same time describing it as one which only a fearless rider would venture to mount.

"Perhaps," said Lord Harold, with a smile, "you are not aware, Mr. Hawkshah, that I am considered by my friends to be a most excellent equestrian; and if you will permit me the opportunity, after luncheon, I will convince you whether I am afraid to take your horse at the highest gate we can find in the fields round about."

"I request, Harold, that you will not be so foolish," said Florina, who, notwithstanding her diminished opinion of her brother's rectitude of principle and worth of character, nevertheless still entertained for him too great a sisterly regard not to be frightened at this proposed venture on his part.

"And I also must interpose my authority," said Lady Macdonald: "that is to say, if I possess any—which indeed I hope I do. For people in our sphere of life——"

"My dear aunt," interrupted Staunton, —"and you also, Florina, I cannot possibly listen to your fears: or rather you must permit me to tell you both that they are quite unfounded. Have I not been out hunting often? did I not ride at the celebrated Dunchurch steeple-chase?"

"But, my lord," said Lady Saxondale, with an air of grave remonstrance, "I think that your aunt and dear Flo have given you most excellent advice: and if you will allow me to add the weight of mine, I must beg that you think no more of riding Mr. Hawkshaw's horse —at least not for the purpose of taking any desperate leaps."

"What does Mr. Hawkshaw himself say?" asked Juliana. "For he of course is the best judge respecting the danger to be incurred."

"You shall see me take a gate first," replied the Squire; "and then you four ladies can constitute a jury to decide whether Lord Harold shall attempt the same achievement."

"Indeed, if there be any danger" said Juliana, throwing a look of alarm upon her lover, "I cannot think of permitting even *you* to try the feat."

"Danger, my dear Miss Farefield!" exclaimed the Squire, at the same time rewarding her with a look of grateful rapture: "there is none for a really good horseman."

"Nevertheless," said Lady Saxondale, "I would much rather that Lord Harold should follow the advice which his aunt and sister have given him. It is foolish to run risks of this kind."

"Well, we shall see," ejaculated

Harold, rising from his seat. "Come, Mr. Hawkshaw—you and I will go down to the stables and have the horse brought out; and the ladies will perhaps join us presently in the park."

No objection was offered to this proposal, and the two gentlemen accordingly withdrew. The ladies then ascended to their chambers to put on their walking attire; and in about half-an-hour they all four traversed the gardens and entered the park, where Mr. Hawkshaw was already mounted on his splendid horse, showing off its paces to Lord Harold Staunton, who admired the animal exceedingly.

"Let us proceed," said the Squire, "towards yonder palings. There is a five-barred gate in that barrier."

Juliana walked by the side of the steed which her admirer rode: and true to the tactics which she had so skilfully adopted, first to captivate and afterwards to secure Mr. Hawkshaw's heart, she talked to him of nothing else but his favourite steed.

"Pray, Harold," said Florina, taking her brother's arm, "do not attempt anything rash. Do not, I beseech you! An accident so soon occurs."

"How is it, Flo," inquired Staunton, "that you are so very anxious concerning me all of a sudden?"

"How can you talk in this manner, Harold?" said his sister, gazing up at him reproachfully as she walked by his side.

"Oh! I thought you were rather cool to me yesterday after my return—and likewise this morning. I did not know, however," continued Staunton, "in what way I had offended you——"

"But whatsoever amount of offence you might give me, Harold," interrupted his sister, "I should still be anxious concerning you all the same; and therefore I beg that you will undertake nothing rash. Of course I am no judge of horses; but it seems to me that Mr. Hawkshaw's is very spirited, and that it is one which only a person accustomed to ride it, and who therefore knows it well, ought to attempt any bold feat with."

"Well, my dear Flo," returned Harold carelessly, "we shall see all about it presently. Pray don't alarm yourself beforehand."

Lady Saxondale and Lady Macdonald had followed at a little distance, and were conversing on the same subject—the former being to all appearances quite as averse as the latter that Staunton should take so daring a leap with a steed which he had never ridden before.

In a few minutes the palings skirting the park were reached: and a halt was made. There was a very high gate in that boundary; and this was the one which Mr. Hawkshaw proposed to leap. Juliana raised her eyes towards him with a look of tenderness and alarm—so that the Squire could scarcely refrain from bending down and giving utterance to a few words expressive of his rapture at the interest which she thus demonstrated on his behalf. Yet he did restrain himself; because the period which he had prescribed for courtship ere avowing his passion, had not yet passed: but then he looked all he would have said, and eloquence of his eyes told a tale satisfactory enough to the intriguing and selfish Miss Farefield.

Taking a proper distance—but with the unconcern and fearlessness of a man who knew perfectly well what his horse could do, and what he himself might in all safety venture—Squire Hawkshaw galloped the steed at the gate and cleared it in the most beautiful style, to the admiration of those who beheld him. Cantering into the middle of the field on the other side of the park-railings, he wheeled the horse round—galloped it back again at the gate—and leaped over in the same admirable manner as before.

"There!" he said, springing from the steed as he reached the spot where the ladies had remained standing with Lord Harold: "you see that anything can be done with this horse."

"Then I am sure that I need not fear to venture," said the young nobleman: and he advanced to take the bridle from the Squire's hand.

"No, Harold!" cried Florina: "do not, I beseech you—do dot!"

But by the time she had uttered these words, her brother had sprung upon the horse; and galloping away, he made a wide circuit, not only to settle himself well upon the animal's back and try its paces for himself, but also to convince the Squire that he was no mean equestrian.

"Your ladyship need fear nothing," said Mr. Hawkshaw, addressing himself to Florina: "for your brother is quite capable of doing with that horse whatsoever I can do."

"But you are such a superb rider," remarked Juliana in an undertone, accompanying her compliment with a tender look.

"Lord Harold is as good as I am," returned the Squire, surveying Staunton's equestrian performance with the eye of a *connoisseur*. "See, he is going to take the gate! Stand back a little. Pray don't be afraid, ladies! I can assure you he is all safe. It is perfectly right—he knows what he is about. Why, he sits upon the back of that horse as if he formed part of it. There—away he goes!"

And away Lord Harold did go, clearing the gate in as fine a style as Mr. Hawkshaw had already twice done. But all in an instant shrieks burst forth from the ladies, and an ejaculation of alarm from the Squire: for scarcely had Staunton leapt the gate, when he disappeared from the horse's back—the steed galloped on—and he was left lying in the field.

"O heaven, he is killed! he is killed!" was the wild cry that issued from Florina's lips: and she sprang frantically towards the gate.

"Do not be alarmed, dear Flo," said Harold, half raising himself, but apparently with great pain; and then he sank back again.

The gate was opened—and in a moment he was surrounded by all the party. He was very pale, and looked up with anguish on his countenance. Florina threw herself upon her knees by his side, while Mr. Hawkshaw assisted her to raise him. Lady Macdonald was excessively alarmed—Lady Saxondale seemed so—and Juliana was frightened as much as it was in her nature to care for anybody.

"Where are you hurt, Harold? For heaven's sake, speak!" cried his sister, full of anguish. "Oh, do speak, Harold!—tell me where you are hurt."

"It is nothing—beyond a mere fall—a few bruises," murmured Staunton, as if with difficulty giving utterance to the words.

Mr. Hawkshaw ran his hands over Lord Harold's arms and then his legs; and finding that he did not give vent to any expression of pain, the Squire at once concluded that no bones were broken.

"Stand up, my lord—let us assist you to rise. There!" he exclaimed, as he and Florina together helped Staunton to regain his feet. "How do you feel now?"

"Better—much better: I am only bruised. Run and get your horse, Hawkshaw: I can stand alone now—or at least supported on my sister's arm. Thanks, dear Flo, for the kind interest you take in me."

Mr. Hawkshaw, now perfectly assured that nothing very serious was the matter with Lord Harold, hastened in pursuit of the steed, which he soon caught; and on leading it back to the spot where the accident had occurred, he found Staunton leaning against the gate surrounded by the ladies, who were receiving his assurances that he only felt very much shaken, but that there was nothing serious to apprehend. To his sister's proposal that medical assistance should be sent for, he gave a decisive negative,—declaring that he had experienced on former occasions more severe falls than the present one.

"The best thing you can do, my lord," said Hawkshaw, "is to get back to the castle and go to bed. You must lie up for two or three days, at the end of which time you will be perfectly recovered."

"Decidedly I shall follow your advice," responded Staunton. "Come, let me lean on your arm, Flo—and your's too, aunt: for I feel somewhat weak—which is to be expected."

"God be thanked it is no worse!" said Lady Macdonald, as she gave her nephew her arm, while Florina fervently echoed her elderly relative's words.

"I can't fancy how the deuce you could have managed it," said Mr. Howkshaw, leading his horse by the bridle, as the party moved slowly onward towards the castle. "You cleared the gate in beautiful style: nobody could have done it better. I watched you as narrowly as possible the whole time; and it seemed to me that when landing on the opposite side, you were as firm in your saddle as at the moment the horse made the spring. But all of a sudden you disappeared as if shot by some unseen hand."

"I myself can scarcely tell how it did occur," replied Harold, speaking in a voice that seemed very feeble and weak. "I don't know whether it was a sudden dizziness or a loss of balance—or whether the horse shied at the moment——"

"No, that I can swear he didn't!" exclaimed Hawkshaw: he never swerved a hair's breadth to right or left, but went straight on as he always does. However, the harm's done: and there is no more use in talking about it. At the same time, my lord, I don't think that your reputation need be considered damaged as a good equestrian: for you certainly took the gate gallantly, and there is no mistake about that."

The party reached the castle; and Lord Harold was conducted up to his chamber, where he got to bed, declaring his intention of remaining there for a day or two. The incident appeared to throw a damp upon the spirits of every one—the gloom being genuine in some respects, feigned no doubt in others. Mr. Hawkshaw, who was a generous and frank-hearted man, expressed himself in the kindest terms relative to Harold: and two or three times in the course of the day he ascended to his lordship's chamber to inquire how he felt. Florina would have remained there altogether to attend upon her brother: but Harold preferred being left alone, as he said that the shock which he had sustained had left an exceeding drowsiness behind it. Mr. Hawkshaw stayed to dinner, which was served up as usual between six and seven o'clock. He and Juliana walked out together in the garden afterwards,—the other ladies remaining in-doors. Between eight and nine o'clock the Squire and Miss Farefield ascended to the drawing-room, where Lady Saxondale, Lady Macdonald, and Florina were seated.

"How gets on the patient?" asked the Squire. "With your ladyship's permission I will pay him another visit; and then perhaps he will like to be left quiet for the rest of the evening."

"Do so," responded Lady Saxondale, to whom the remark was addressed. "I will accompany you. And, Florina—perhaps you will come with us?"

The three accordingly proceeded to Staunton's chamber; and in answer to their queries he said that he felt very stiff and sore—that he was much bruised—and feared he should be unable to leave his chamber for some days. Florina again urged the necessity of having professional assistance; but her brother said that it was useless—and Mr. Hawkshaw himself did not consider it to be by any means necessary, adding that a good night's rest would do wonders for him.

"We will therefore leave his lordship to his repose," said Lady Saxondale. "The bell-pull is within your reach: and I have given orders that your slightest wants or wishes are to be attended to."

"My grateful thanks are due to your ladyship," replied Staunton, with as much respect as if not the slightest improper intimacy had ever taken place between himself and the splendid mistress of the castle.

Her ladyship, Florina, and Mr. Hawkshaw, wished Harold good night, and quitted the chamber,—returning to the drawing-room, where they reported to Lady Macdonald and Juliana how the patient was getting on.

"I must now leave you to amuse yourselves as best you can for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour," said Lady Saxondale, "while I repair to the library to write a few letters."

Thus speaking, she quitted the room. But her absence was not longer than she had specified; and on her return she sat down to join in the conversation with her daughter and her guests.

CHAPTER LXXI.

A TRAGEDY

It was about half-past eight o'clock on this same evening of which we are speaking, that Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril set out on foot from an hotel at Gainsborough, where they had arrrived during the afternoon; and they proceeded along the bank of the river towards Saxondale Castle. The sun had gone down half-an-hour previously: the twilight was waning—the dusk was setting in—but by the appearance of the evening there was no probability of the darkness being so great as to render the walk by the side of the Trent at all dangerous. Deveril, moreover had been there before, and perfectly, remembered the various features of the route.

"I wonder whether the fellow Chiffin will keep his appointment," said Mr. Gunthorpe, after they had walked a considerable distance—and it was now past nine o'clock.

"I think there can be no doubt of it," replied Deveril. "The man is evidently one who will do anything for money; and the prospect of receiving a large reward from you, sir, will win him over to our interests. But really I am quite ashamed when I think of all the trouble you are taking on my behalf—and what is more still, all the money you are spending.

"Stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe petulantly. "How often am I to tell you not to address me in that way? If you ever speak to me again in such terms, I shall think that you mean intentionally to offend me."

"No, my dear sir—you cannot think *that*: because you know it to be impossible. On the contrary, you would doubtless consider it very extraordinary if I did not express all my gratitude towards you. Ah! it was here," suddenly exclaimed Deveril, "that I rescued that strange woman from drowning; and yonder is the cottage to which we were both conveyed. You perceive that glimmering light?"

"Yes," said Mr. Gunthrope; "and I tell you what, William—I feel uncommonly thirsty; and we will just step out of our way that much, and call upon those good peasants. There is plenty of time: for Chiffin will of course wait for us. That confounded soup at the hotel in Gainsborough was so salt that it has left my throat as dry as if I had been eating red herrings."

Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril accordingly turned away from the bank of the river and approached the cottage, which they reached in a few minutes. On knocking at the door it was opened by the peasant himself, who instantaneously recognizing Deveril as the light from the room streamed upon his countenance, gave vent to an ejaculation of surprise and joy

"This is kind of you, sir, to come and see us again! Walk in, Sir. Mother, here is Mr. Deveril—and another gentleman along with him."

"They are both heartily welcome," said the old woman, making her appearance; and in the kindness of her heart she grasped Deveril's hand.

Our young hero and Mr. Gunthorpe entered the little sitting-room of the cottage, where the old woman's daughter welcomed Deveril in her turn. But there were two other persons in this room—two females. One was handsomely dressed, and had the air, if not exactly of a lady, at least of a person in good circumstances; while the other who appeared to be her maid, carried a large brown paper parcel in her hand. It immediately struck Deveril that he had seen the countenance of the lady before: but he could not at the instant recollect when or where.

"Sit down, gentleman," said the old woman, bustling about to give Mr. Gunthorpe and our hero chairs: "there's plenty of room. Well, we *have* got company this evening! Who would have thought it? This lady and her maid have taken a longer walk than they meant to do, as they say—and were so tired they were obliged to step in and sit down for a few minutes. But what will you take, gentlemen? Our fare is humble, yet such as it is you are most welcome."

"My friend here," answered Deveril, "is exceedingly thirst. A draught of water, or milk——"

"Or cider?" exclaimed the old woman. "We have got some good cider; and this lady and her maid have pronounced it excellent."

"Yes—that assurance I can certainly give you, gentlemen," said the handsomely dressed female, who had never taken her fine dark eyes off Deveril since the first moment he entered the cottage; for she was evidently struck by the exceeding beauty of his person, as well perhaps by having heard his name mentioned by the old woman's son when he made his appearance.

Deveril bowed courteously as she spoke; and again it struck him that he had seen her before.

"If it be not impertinent, sir," she said, "are you the Mr. Deveril whose name created so much sympathy on a recent occasion?"—then as her hero again bowed, though somewhat distantly—for he did not much like the hardihood of his questioner's looks.—she exclaimed, "Ah! I am well acquainted with Lord Harold Staunton, and his intimate friend Lord Saxondale too."

"Do you come from London, then?" inquired Mr. Gunthorpe, in his blunt manner.

"I reside habitually in London," was the response; "but a little business has brought me down into these parts. I dare say," added the lady, "that my name is not unfamiliar to you, gentlemen. I am Mademoiselle D'Alembert of the Italian Opera."

"Ah!" ejaculated Deveril, now instantaneously recollecting where he had seen her countenance before.

"Yes—that is my name," she continued, flattering herself that it was in admiring surprise that the young gentleman had sent forth that exclamation. "But come," she added, addressing herself to her *soubrette*: "we must be off."

Rising from her seat, she ostentatiously took from her purse a sovereign, which she tendered to the old woman of the cottage, who literally confounded herself in curtseys at this unlooked-for liberality; but Mademoiselle D'

Alembert, turning abruptly away with the air of one who does not require thanks for any evidence of her bounty, said in a sort of half-whisper to our hero, "If, on your return to London, Mr. Deveril, you would favour me with a call at Evergreen Villa, in the Seven Sisters' Road, Holloway, I shall be happy to receive you."

'I thank you, Mademoiselle" replied William, bowing coldly and distantly: "but I shall not be enabled to avail myself of your polite invitation."

The large dark eyes of Emily Archer flashed with sudden fires—her countenance became crimson—she bit her lips, and was evidently about to give utterance to some angry ejaculation, for she was deeply mortified; but restraining herself, she passed on without saying a word, flouncing indignantly out of the cottage, followed by the *soubrette*, who turned up her nose with a half grimace at both Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe as she whisked by them.

"Ah! they be London folks, I see," said the old woman. "They give their gold—but they also give theirselves airs."

The cider was now produced. Mr. Gunthrope and Deveril each took a glass, and pronounced it excellent.

"I wonder what that woman and her servant can be doing out here at such a time in the evening," observed Mr. Gunthorpe to our hero. "It's very strange—is it not? But didn't she say she was acquainted with Lord Saxondale? Perhaps she has come after him. However, it's no business of our's:"—then turning to the peasant woman, he said, "You behaved most kindly to my young friend here on a recent occasion; and though I have no doubt he testified his gratitude, yet you must permit me to show mine on his behalf."

With these words Mr. Gunthorpe put five sovereigns upon the table—and then hurried out of the cottage, accompanied by William Deveril, but followed to the door by the old woman, her son, and daughter, who all three poured forth their most heartfelt gratitude for this proof of generosity. And true generosity it was—the money being given from motives of the purest kindness, very different indeed from the ostentation which had ere now accompanied the gift of Emily Archer.

Mr. Gunthrope and Deveril sped away from the cottage, and in a few minutes reached the bank of the river, where there were almost immediately joined by Chiffin the Cannibal, who was coming from the direction of Saxondale Castle. The ruffian had his club under his arm, and his hands thrust into the pockets of his great rough shaggy coat: his battered white hat was cocked a little on one side—and the blue smoke was curling up from the bowl of a short pipe which he held in his mouth.

"Well gentlemen," he said, "so you are come according to appointment? My eyes, what a lark I have just had! There was two women a little way farther on in that direction,"—jerking his thumb over his shoulder towards the castle; "and when they saw me they screeched out as if they took me for a highwayman. Now really, gentlemen, I think I look a trifle more respectable than *that*—don't I?"—and Mr. Chiffin gave a deep chuckling laugh at what he considered to be the merriness of his conceit.

"Ah, I suppose they are the same we saw just now at the hut," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Is it possible that they are going to the castle?"

"Well, it looks like it," responded Chiffin. "But I say, gentlemen—if anything is to be done to-night, we must look sharp. For it's now close upon ten o'clock and at eleven, you know, her ladyship will peep into the chapel of the castle to see if I am there."

"Well," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "you are to introduce us thither along with you. I suppose there are plenty of places where we can be secreted, while you hold your discourse with her ladyship?"

"Plenty," answered Chiffin, "There's the steps leading from the vestiary down into the vaults; you can stand there just inside the door. Or what's better perhaps, there's the tombs, behind one of which you can hide as nice as possible; 'cause why I can walk as if quite promiscuous in there, while chatting with her ladyship. But mind, whatever she wants done I am going to ask a blessed high reward; and if she agrees, you've got to double it."

"The bargain is well understood," answered Mr. Gunthorpe. "But now tell us how you propose to introduce us into the castle: for we dont want to stand the chance of being shot at like burglars.

" No fear of that, sir," replied Chiffin. " It's on the western side that overlooks the river. The wall comes flush down into the water——"

" Then how the deuce are we to get in ? " demanded Mr. Gunthorpe.

" Why, you see, sir, the river's quite shallow—not knee deep—all along just under the wall ; and it goes shelving down so gradual that there's no chance of getting out of your depth. Then there's a precious great tree that grows right up out of the bed of the river against some of the windows ; and there's a thundering big bough that goes right bang across one of them windows—and it's as easy climbing up that tree as if it was a ladder. You ain't the thinnest person in the world, sir : but you can manage this here business with no more bother than if you was walking upstairs. Ther's a precious sight nastier tree than that to climb, I can tell you, gentlemen—a leafless one that they sometimes set up at the debtors' door of Newgate ; "—and the Cannibal again sent forth that low deep chuckle which was horrible to hear.

" Come, a truce to this jesting," said Mr. Gunthorpe sternly.

During the above colloquy the two gentlemen and Chiffin had been walking hastily in the direction of the castle. At the very moment that those last words had issued in a tone of rebuke from Mr. Gunthorpe's lips, the report of a pistol from a little distance reached their ears. This was followed by a shriek in a female voice ; and quick as thought, a second report of a pistol was heard. Then all was still.

"Good God, what is that? " cried Mr. Gunthorpe.

An ejaculation likewise burst from Deveril's lips ; and the two gentlemen, accompanied by Chiffin, rushed along the bank of the river in the same direction they were already pursuing—namely, towards the castle: for it was in that same direction whence the pistol-shots and the scream had emanated.

In a few minutes they beheld something dark lying across the pathway ahead: another minute, and they distinctly perceived that there were two objects. The next minute brought them up to the spot—where, to the unspeakable horror and dismay of Mr. Gunthorope and Deveril, and to the astonishment of Chiffin, they beheld the forms of two female stretched upon the ground.

" The same we have at the cottage!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe, as soon as he could recover the power of speech—while Deveril, stooping down, pronounced life to be extinct in both.

The countenance of the unfortunate Emily Archer was dreadfully disfigured, the pistol-bullet having evidently penetrated her forehead, shattering all the upper part of the head. The *soubrette* had been killed by a ball penetrating her heart—for that side of her dress was saturated with blood. It was a sad—a ghastly—a shocking spectacle : and both Mr. Gunthorpe and our hero shuddered from head to foot, as if stricken with an ice-chill.

" Well, I am blowed," said Chiffin the Cannibal, " if it isn't a deuced lucky thing for me that I was with you gentlemen at the time or else you would have been sure to say it was me as did it."

" What, in the name of heaven, is to be done ?" exclaimed Deveril addressing himself to Mr. Gunthorpe, but glancing towards Chiffin : then in the Italian language he said, quickly and whisperingly, " If this man is seen with us, we shall be accused of the deed!"

" True " replied Mr. Gunthorpe, now recovering his presence of mind, but still trembling from head to foot with feelings of indescribable horror : then thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew forth a quantiry of notes and gold, and giving them to Chiffin, said, " Begone ! Stay not here for another moment—or no power on earth could make the authorities of justice believe that you are innocent of this !"

" Right enough ?" ejaculated the Cannibal, clutching the money with avidity. " But what about the business yonder ?"—and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder towards the castle.

" It is possible that you think of staying in this neighbourhood ?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe.

" No—I should rather think not," was the cannibal's quick response.

" Then away with you !" cried both Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril in a breath.

Chiffin sped off across the fields, away from the vicinage of the river, and was speedily lost to the view.

The colloquy just recorded had scarcely occupied a minute—during which Deveril looked about in every direction to see if he could discover the slightest trace of the path which the murderer or muderers had pursued :

but there was no indication to lead him to any such discovery. Indeed, it was evident enough that the flight of the author or authors of the terrible deed must have been exceedingly precipitate: for at the moment when Gunthorpe, Deveril and Chiffin had first come up to the spot, no sound of retreating footsteps had met their ears—no form vanishing in the distance had caught their glance. One circumstance Deveril now observed—which was, that the parcel the *soubrette* carried in her hand when at the cottage had disappeared.

"Now what is to be done, sir?" asked Deveril, so soon as the Cannibal had taken his departure.

"Hasten you to the hut, and bid the peasant repair with all possible speed to Gainsborough—or else to the nearest country magistrate—that information may be given."

"And you will remain here?" asked Deveril.

"Yes—certainly," rejoined Mr. Gunthorpe. "We must take care that the bodies of these unfortunate women are not touched until the authorities have seen them."

"But if the murderers should return, you might not be safe? Suffer me to wait here and keep watch, while you repair to the cottage."

"No such thing, William! Do as I bid you. Begone at once!"—and Mr. Gunthorpe spoke in a very peremptory manner.

Deveril accordingly offered no farther remonstrance—but hastened back to the cottage, which was about a mile distant. The inmates were just shutting up the place in preparation for retiring to rest but they were not as yet in bed. Deveril knocked loudly and impatiently with his clenched hand at the door; and when it was opened, his pale countenance and horrified looks at once showed that something dreadful had occurred. His tale was quickly told; and it naturally produced consternation and dismay on the part of the old woman, her son, and daughter. The man himself, as soon as he had regained his self possession, at once declared his readiness to hasten to Gainsborough with whatsoever message Deveril thought it right to send; and our hero accordingly bade him use all possible despatch and inform the local constabulary of what had occurred. The peasant set off on his errand, and William Deveril hastened to rejoin Mr. Gunthorpe, whom he found pacing to and fro on the bank of the river close by the spot where the murdered woman lay, stretched.

Two hours elapsed, during which Mr. Gunthorpe and our hero remained upon the scene of the awful crime that had been perpetrated. But little was the conversation that passed between them: their feelings were too highly wrought—too full of horror and consternation—to enable them to enter upon deliberate discourse. As for any conjecture relative to the author or authors of the crime, they could offer none. It was indeed shrouded in the darkest, deepest mystery: for according to the appearance presented by the bodies of the murdered women, it was evident their persons had not been rifled.

To add to the utter discomfort of the position of the gentlemen, the sky grew overcast and the rain began to fall—at first only drizzling, but in a little while descending more sharply—until at length it poured down in torrents. They had no umbrellas: but they stood up under the thick canopy of a neighbouring tree, and thus avoided being completely drenched by the rain.

At the expiration of the two hours they heard persons advancing along the bank of the river from the direction of Gainsborough; and half a dozen individuals soon made their appearance. These consisted of a magistrate, a surgeon, and some constables, accompanied also by the peasant. In a few words Mr. Gunthorpe explained to the magistrate the circumstances under which himself and Deveril had discovered the murder. The lanterns which the constables had with them, were lighted,—the position in which the bodies lay was carefully noted by the authorities—and the magistrate then decided upon having the corpses conveyed to Gainsborough Some hurdles were procured; and upon these the bodies were placed. The procession then set out along the bank of the river, through the deluging rain, towards the town.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE CHAPEL.

We left Lady Saxondale and her guests seated together in conversation in one of the magnificent drawing-room of the castle, after a visit had been paid to Lord Harold's chamber. Lady Saxondale herself had retired for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to the library, as she stated, to write a letter or two; and on her return to the drawing-room she joined in the conversation which was progressing at the time. Mr. Hawkshaw sat with Juliana a little apart from the rest; and though they both mingled in the general discourse, yet he found an opportunity of manifesting the little attentions and paying those assiduities which belong to the pleasing ceremony of courtship Florina was, alone of all the party, desponding and abstracted. She was previously in low spirits before the accident occurred to her brother; and that circumstance had naturally tended to depress her still more. Lady Macdonald, satisfied that there was nothing alarming in her nephew's position, had regained the wonted equanimity of her disposition: Lady Saxondale studied to render herself as agreeable as she could—and such an attempt on her part was never made in vain. Towards Mr. Hawkshaw she was particularly courteous and affable—although there was nothing in her manner to show that she played the part of a manœuvring mother endeavouring to secure an eligible husband for her daughter. Nor indeed was it at all necessary for her to lend her aid in the matter: as Juliana had played her cards so well that Mr. Hawkshaw was ensnared, to all appearances, beyond the possibility of self-emancipation from the thraldom of love.

At about ten o'clock supper was served up; and Florina suggested that as her brother had taken but little refreshment since the accident of the the morning, he might possibly require some now. She accordingly intimated her intention of ascending to his chamber to make the inquiry.

"I will accompany you, Flo," said her ladyship, displaying all the concern of a generous hostess with regard to an invalid guest.

The two ladies thereupon quitted the room, and ascended to Lord Harold's chamber. On reaching the door, Lady Saxondale said in a whispering voice, "If he sleeps, Flo, it will be a pity to disturb him. Let us enter very carefully indeed,

Lady Saxondale accordingly opened the door with the utmost caution, and listened upon the threshold. The wax-lights were burning upon the mantel; and her ladyship, motioning with her hand for Florina to remain where she was, advanced on tiptoe towards the couch: then having peeped between the curtains, she retreated in the same noiseless manner towards Florina, to whom she whispered, "He is sleeping soundly!"

The young lady was pleased by this announcement—because the circumstance appeared to indicate an absence of pain on her brother's part, and therefore that he had in reality received no serious injury. Lady Saxondale closed the door again with the same caution she had displayed on opening it; and, accompanied by Florina, she retraced her way to the apartment where the supper was served up.

"What news?" inquired Mr. Hawkshaw, who throughout had shown the most generous interest on Lord Harold's behalf.

"Our patient is sleeping soundly," replied Lady Saxondale with an air of great satisfaction.

"So much the better," observed Mr. Hawkshaw. "You may depend upon it that in a day or two he will be all right again. If he suffered much pain he would not be sleeping in that manner."

Florina was well pleased to hear an opinion which thus confirmed her own hope; and she felt somewhat more cheerful. It was nearly eleven o'clock before Mr. Hawkshaw took his departure; and ere he withdrew, he asked Lady Saxondale to be allowed to ride over in the morning and make personal inquiries relative to the invalid. This permission was of course accorded; and the Squire's horse having been gotten in readiness, he left the castle.

Immediately after he had thus taken his leave, the ladies withdrew to their respective chambers.

It was now eleven o'clock: and Lady Saxondale, on reaching her own room dismissed her maids for the night, with the intimation that she intended to sit up reading a little while ere she sought her couch. In about a quarter of an hour—when she thought the household was quiet—she stole forth from that chamber, and proceeded to Lord Harold's. There she remained only a few minutes, in conversation with the young nobleman; and on issuing forth again--instead of returning at once to her own room—she proceeded along the galleries leading to the western side of the castle. She extinguished the candle which she carried in her hand, and felt her way through the gloom of those corridors to the chapel—on entering which, she closed the door and then re-lighted the candle, having brought matches with her for the purpose. This precaution she adopted to prevent any of the inmates of the castle perceiving, from the opposite side of the courtyard, a light moving along the galleries of the uninhabited portion of the building.

Scarcely had she thus obtained a light again, when the sound of foot-steps reached her ear; and forth from the place of tombs emerged the unmistakable form of Chiffin the Cannibal.

"Ah! you have come at last?" said Lady Saxondale.

"Yes," was his growling response: "but I had a deuced great mind not to venture here at all to-night—for there's a precious rum thing took place at a little distance about two or three miles away towards Gainsborough."

"And what is that?" demanded Lady Saxondale, fixing her eyes upon the ruffian in a penetrating manner.

"Why, nothing more nor less than a double murder," responded Chiffin.

"A double murder?" echoed her ladyship. "What do you mean? Have you——"

"No, not I; and it's a precious lucky thing for me that I had witnesses to the contrary—or else, if I had been seen lurking about in these parts——"

"Witnesses?" ejaculated her ladyship. "Do you mean me to understand that you brought any of your companions or friends with you?"

"Nothing of the sort," interrupted Chiffin. "But I will tell your ladyship all about it——"

"The murder? Speak of that first. Who has been murdered? and what mean you by a double murder?"

"I mean what I say—that there is two young women lying dead—or at least I left them there—on the river's bank, both killed with pistol-bullets. I heard the report; and so did two gentlemen that was there at the time."

"And you would have me believe," said her ladyship, now fixing her eyes with a still more peculiar look than at first upon the Cannibal, "that this is not your work?"

"It's so like mine that your ladyship can't very easy believe it isn't: but it isn't though for all that.

"And these women? You say that you have left two gentlemen upon the spot——"

"I have got a little tale to tell your ladyship, and then you will see," continued Chiffin, "that I am a right staunch, trustworthy kind of a fellow. But first of all you must tell me what you wanted me down here for—and all about it."

"I do not require your services just at present," answered Lady Saxondale. "Circumstances have changed. But of course I shall reward you for your trouble; and it may be that in two or three weeks I shall need your aid. I will however write to you again. Here, take this pocket: it contains a recompense which I have no doubt will satisfy you. And now what have you to tell me?"

"Of course," replied Chiffin, taking the little parcel, and weighing it for a moment in his hand so as to calculate the probable amount of gold it might contain, "your ladyship will consider that what I am going to tell you is worthy of a farther reward?"

"Go on, go on," interrupted Lady Saxondale impatiently. "You have already received sufficient proofs that I know how to behave liberally."

"Well, you see, ma'am," resumed the Cannibal, "t'other night two gentlemen came to me at Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town, and very perlitely introduced themselves as Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, with a visible start; and her face, already pale this night, grew paler still. "But proceed. What did they require of you?"

"They told me that Mr. Deveril was at Gainsborough when your ladyship posted that note to me—that he saw it posted—and that he knew it was you that posted it—and what's more, too, he saw the address."

"But this is absolutely impossible!" cried Lady Saxondale, in mingled amazement and consternation. "You are deceiving me—you have betrayed me!"

"Oh, well—if that's your opinion,"

observed the Cannibal gruffly, " I may as well be off."

"No, no : proceed with what you have to say. Go on—I will not interrupt you again."

" Well, ma'am—that's what the gentlemen said," continued Chiffin ; " and they further stated that for certain reasons of their own they were uncommon anxious to see the contents of the letter. " So, as there was nothing particular in it, I did show it to them."

" You showed it to them ?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale angrily, and also in terror.

" Well, I thought it best: they seemed so positive that you had written it—and I couldn't possibly deny it."

" But what in heaven's name must they think now ?" murmured Lady Saxondale in accents of despair.

" Don't you see, ma'am, I was acting in your interest ? I wanted to draw the gentlemen out, and ascertain what object they had in view. So I pretended to tumble into their schemes ; and they said that whatever reward you offered me for doing what you required, they would double it. Then they said that they should come down here into Lincolnshire, and I must manage to make them overhear what was to take place betwixt you and me. Now you know how it was they were in these parts to-night. But a very few minutes after I had joined them, we heard the report of pistol-shots : we rushed along the bank, and found the two dead bodies. Then the gentlemen got freightened at my being with them : they didn't think me quite respectable enough, I suppose—and so they bundled me off at once, giving up their scheme of getting into the castle. At first I thought of cutting away out of the neighbourhood as hard as I could : but then I reflected that it was better to come and see your ladyship, and tell you what is in the wind in respect to Mr. Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe. So I made circuit and got back again to the castle—and that's all I have to tell you. Now, if your ladyship thinks this is worth anything——"

" Yes : you know I shall reward you," interrupted Lady Saxondale, impatiently. " But did you really mean to introduce these personages into the castle ?"

" Well, to speak the truth," answered Chiffin, " I should have done so : but then I should have took uncommon good care to tip you a wink, or drop you a word in a whisper, not to talk on any serious business. That fact is, I wanted to see this matter out with them two gentlemen ; and that's all about it."

Lady Saxondale said not another word : but drawing forth her purse, which contained notes and gold, she emptied it into the Cannibal's hand. His eyes glittered with a horrible reptile light, as he thought to himself that what the money he had received from Mr. Gunthorpe and the two separate sums he had just obtained from lady Saxondale, he had made an excellent evening's work of it.

" And so, ma'am, you have nothing more for me to do to-night ?" he resumed, as he consigned the money to his pocket.

" Nothing. When I need your services again, I will write to you. You will do well to get out of this neighbourhood as quick as possible."

" I mean to do so. Thank you for the advice, ma'am : I have no inclination to get took up on suspicion of doing what I didn't do."

" But one word more," said Lady Saxondale. " It is probable that Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril may seek you out again. If so, can I rely upon your letting me know what they want of you ? You are well aware that your reward will not be deficient."

" Depend upon it, ma'am—you shan't be kept in the dark," responded Chiffin.

" But still one word more !" remarked Lady Saxondale, after a few instants' deep reflection. " You are going back to London——"

" Yes : I shall walk all the rest of this night."

" Well, well, you are going back to London, I say—and no doubt Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril will be going back to London also. Now, if they should both visit you again at the place in Agar Town, are there no means—— But you understand me ? "—and the lady looked with dark and ominous significancy at the Cannibal.

" Well, I think I do, ma'am," he replied, a horrible leer corroborating his words. " Yes—it's quite possible for them two gentlemen to tumble down into a cellar at the *Billy Goat* and break their necks—or disappear somehow or another in such an unaccountable way that their friends shall never know what the deuce to think of it——"

" I do no not wish to hear any more," interrupted Lady Saxondale : then in a low murmuring voice, she added, as she again fixed her eyes with a look of deep meaning upon the Cannibal, "But this much I may say—I dislike those two persons so much that if you did happen to come with the intelligence that they had disappeared so unaccountably as you state, I think that in my satisfaction I should make a present of a couple of thousand guineas."

"Ah! that's something like!" exclaimed the Cannibal, a ferocious joy appearing upon his countenance. "Not another word, ma'am, upon the subject. I dare say you will see me again before long."

"Every Monday and Thursday night," added Lady Saxondale, "at eleven o'clock, I shall look into the chapel. And now you must take your departure."

Chiffin delayed not to follow this intimation, and succeeded in effecting his egress from the building by means of the window in the adjacent tapestry-chamber.

Lady Saxondale, extinguishing the light, regained her own chamber without being observed by any inmate of the castle: and when she was alone, she sat down and gave way to her reflections.

"Can that man be trusted?" she asked herself. "Did he not meditate treachery towards me when agreeing to admit that odious Gunthorpe, and that Deveril—who is alike loved and detested—into the castle? I can scarcely understand the true meaning of the villain's conduct. But no matter I will write to him no more: nor will I farther place myself in his power. If the hints I have thrown out and the immensity of the reward I have offered shall attempt him to remove these enemies from my path, so much the better: and if he should ever dare to proclaim that he received the hint from me, who would believe him? No one—But how could it have been that William Deveril was at Gainsborough the other day? Was it to obtain a secret interview with Florina? Ah! and that girl's coolness and reserve towards me! Yes, yes—assuredly she has seen Deveril, and he has done his best to prejudice her against me. But I will defeat all my enemies yet: I will defeat them—and I will triumph!"

But, Oh! at what a price were Lady Saxondale's victories to be won and triumphs to be accomplished? She herself shuddered at the idea.

On the following morning, when the postman from Gainsborough called at Saxondale Castle with letters for some of its inmates, he related to the domestics such particulars of the horrible and mysterious murder which had taken place on the previous night, as were current through the town. Lady Saxondale had not yet descended from her own chamber; and Lucilla, one of her maids, brought her up the intelligence which she had just received from the other servants after the postman had called. Her ladyship, who could not of course admit that she had received the same tidings during the past night, affected to be alike shocked and amazed. She asked for further particulars. Lucilla went on to inform her that Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril had discovered the bodies, and that they were going to be examined as witnesses at the coroner's inquest in the course of the morning. Lady Saxondale inquired if suspicion attached itself to any one: but on this point the maid could give her no explanation.

On descending to the breakfast parlour, Lady Saxondale found Lady Macdonald, Juliana, and Florina already assembled there. The tidings had reached their ears; and they were unfeignedly shocked and astounded. Lady Saxondale attentively watched Florina's countenance when the name of William Deveril was mentioned; and she saw that the young damsel exhibited signs of considerable emotion. Her ladyship was half inclined, through sheer maliciousness, to throw out a hint that Mr. Gunthorpe and the young artist were themselves suspected of the crime: but this she felt would be too preposterous, as not a word to that effect had been mentioned by the postman or by any of the domestics retailing his intelligence.

"Have you seen Lord Harold this morning?" inquired Lady Saxondale of Florina.

"I have: and I am grieved to say that he is not so well as I had hoped and expected to find him. He has passed a good night—but it has not rendered him the benefit which might have been anticipated."

"Doubtless he feels the bruises more to-day," said Lady Macdodald, "than he even did yesterday. It is always the case; and persons in our sphere of life," she added, using her favourite expression, "are more tender and delicate than the lower orders, who think nothing of common accidents."

"Is your brother acquainted with the horrible tragedy the intelligence of which has just reached us?" asked Lady Saxondale, again addressing herself to Florina.

"I thought it better to tell him of it." she replied. "An invalid is always more or less nervous; and I was fearful that he might feel the shock, if the tidings were too abruptly communicated. For, Oh; there is something truly horrible in the reflection that while we were all seated together in the drawing room last evening, and Harold was slumbering profoundly in his couch, such a terrific crime was being accomplished within two or there miles of the castle, and we utterly unsuspicious of the occurrence!"

"It is indeed very terrible—very shocking," observed Lady Saxondale. "It quite makes one shudder."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE INQUEST.

AT a public-house on the outskirts of Gainsborough nearest to the point whence the mournful procession had started with the two dead bodies on the preceding night, the coroner's inquest was holden at midday. As might be expected, the tragedy had produced the utmost consternation throughout the town and neighbourhood; and the public-house where the corpses had been deposited, was surrounded from an early hour in the morning by a crowd of persons, all anxious to obtain any additional particulars that might transpire.

At twelve o'clock, as above stated, the coroner arrived; and the proceedings were opened in the largest room which the public-house contained. A jury was speedily sworn in; and the various witnesses were kept together in an adjoining apartment,—Mr. Gunthorpe, Deveril, and the peasant being amongst them.

The coroner and jury, having viewed the two bodies,—which were in a third room, and had in the meantime undergone a surgical examination,—commenced the proceedings.

The first witness called, was the landlotd of an hotel at the town. He deposed that the deceased lady, accompanied by her maid, had arrived at his establishment at abont three o'clock on the preceding day. They had travelled post from Lincoln; and on the lady's box was the name of Mademoiselle D'Alembert; but she appeared to be an English woman by her speech and accent. She had dined by herself in a private room at about five o'clock, her maid having previously partaken of refreshments in the servants' room of the hotel. At seven o'clock Mademoiselle D'Alembert had tea; shortly after which she and her servant went out together, Mademoiselle intimating to the landlady that they were going to visit some friends whom she had in Gainsborough, and that they might not be home till eleven o'clock. The landlord had noticed that the maid carried a large brown paper parcel in her hand: but what it contained he did not know, and had not given the matter a thought at the time. From that moment he had not seen the deceased females again.

The peasant was the next witness called in. He stated that at about nine o'clock the lady and her maid approached the cottage where he dwelt with his mother and sister; and as he was standing outside the door at the time, they asked him to be permitted to sit down for a little while, as they had taken a longer walk than they had at first intended, and were tired. They were invited to enter: they sat down; and such refreshments as the cottage afforded, were offered, of which they partook. Soon afterwards two gentlemen came to the cottage, one having been there before some few days previously. The peasant then described how Mr. Deveril saved a woman from drowning on the occasion to which he referred, and how that circumstance had rendered him an inmate of the cottage for a whole night. The peasant, in answer to the coroner, stated that it was perfectly evident that Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril were totally unknown to the two females previous to meeting them there, as he gathered from the conversation which passed between them at the time. The lady and her maid took their departure: but no one inside the cottage at the time had any opportunity of perceiving in what direction they proceeded. The two gentlemen waited perhaps ten minutes longer, and gave his (the peasant's) mother five sovereigns on account of the kind treatment one of them had experienced, as previously described, at the cottage. It was perhaps three quarters of an hour afterwards that Mr. Deveril came rushing back with horrified looks, bearing the intelligence that the two females were murdered, and ordering him (the peasant) to proceed at once to Gainsborough and give the alarm.

William Deveril was the next witness called in. He stated that he had arrived with his friend Mr. Gunthorpe at Gainsborough on the previous day, and that in the evening they set out along the bank of the river for the purpose of proceeding to Saxondale Castle. He then described how he and Mr. Gunthorpe had called at the cottage—how they met the two deceased females there—how one of them had introduced herself as Mademoiselle D'Alembert, of the Italian Opera—and how she had likewise mentioned her knowledge of Lord Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton. Here the coroner asked Deveril if there were any reason to suppose that the deceased were on their way to Saxondale Castle: but our hero could not hazard a conjecture on the subject—much less speak with any degree of certainty. He then proceeded to describe how himself and Mr. Gunthorpe, after leaving the cottage, had heard the pistol-shots and the scream. There was an interval of not more than a few moments between the shots; and it was immediately after the first that the cry was heard,—the inference being that on one female being suddenly shot dead, the other had screamed out and the next moment met her death likewise. Then William Deveril detailed how he had sped to the cottage to give the alarm, and had subsequently rejoined Mr. Gunthorpe to keep watch until the authorities should come. It appeared that they both noticed that the parcel which the maid had carried, was missing.

The coroner having heard Deveril's evidence, thought that the jury might dispense with that of Mr. Gunthorpe, as it would merely prove a repetition of the testimony just given.

The magistrate who had proceeded to the spot where the murder was committed, was the next witness called in, and he deposed to the circumstance of being summoned thither, and finding the bodies in the condition in which they were almost immediately afterwards removed to the public-house at Gainsborough. He had subsequently superintended the search which was made about the persons of the deceased, and had seen that their money and their trinkets were all safe about them—so that the murderer or murderers had not rifled the victims of their property, beyond the large parcel which had been proved to be missing.

The head constable of Gainsborough was next exclaimed. He deposed that he had visited the scene of the tragedy with some of his men on the preceding night, and that he had returned thither immediately after day-break in the morning. He had narrowly searched all about to discover, if possible, any trace which might afford a clue to the unravelling of the mystery. He had searched for the marks of footsteps farther along the bank than where the murder had been perpetrated: but the torrents of rain which fell during the night, had obliterated all traces of footmarks everywhere round about. He had likewise searched in the adjacent fields for any evidence to prove that the parcel had been opened—if brown paper or string, for instance, had been thrown away: but nothing had transpired to show the track which the murderer or murderers had pursued after committing the crime. He had likewise made inquiries at some of the cottages as to whether any suspicious-looking individuals had been seen lurking about the neighbourhood: but he could obtain no positive information upon the subject.

The surgeon gave his evidence last of all. It was to the effect that Mademoiselle d'Alembert had been shot in the head—her servant through the heart. From certain indications, it was evident that the pistol or pistols must have been fired close to them, and that death must have been instantaneous in both cases.

The examination, which lasted three hours, was now concluded so far as the depositions of the witnesses were concerned; and the coroner summed up to the jury. He represented the deed as one of those mysterious tragedies which occasionally occur, without leaving the slightest clue to the diabolical perpetrators. In the present instance it would appear, judging by all the evidence given, that the author or authors of the crime had been disturbed immediately after its perpetration by the ejaculations of alarm sent forth by Mr. Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe—and that not having time to rifle the victims, the murderer or murderers had snatched up the parcel and fled precipitately with it. The coroner went very carefully through all the evidence; and one portion of his summming up was too remarkable, for several reasons, not to be recorded here:—

"I can conceive, gentlemen, no position more unpleasant for any persons to be placed in, than that of Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril in the present instance. It is too frequently the case that thoughtless individuals, and those who are in the habit of arriving at rash and hasty conclusions, greedily seize upon the slightest circumstances which seem to be suspicious, and thus do at once affix the taint of suspicion upon innocent persons. I feel it to be my duty to make these remarks upon the present occasion, inasmuch as the discoverers of a crime may not incur the risk of being identified with the criminals. In the present case we have two gentlemen who, so far from being in needy circumstances, bounteously reward a poor peasant family for hospitalities and services previously vouchsafed. Acicdent brings them for the moment in contact with those persons whom they are destined shortly afterwards to find stretched lifeless upon the ground. But it is clear that these gentlemen and those victims were previously unacquainted with each other, and that an invitation was given by the lady to one of these gentlemen to visit her in London—which he however civilly declined. When these gentlemen discover the bodies, nothing is plundered from them except a parcel which by its size and description propably contained some dress or articles of clothing. The gentlemen moreover give a prompt alarm, render all possible assistance, and voluntarily come forward to tender their evidence at this inquest. One of these gentlemen recently saved the life of a female in that very river on the bank of which the present tragedy took place—thus exhibiting a magnanimity and generosity of conduct deserving all our admiration. Gentlemen of the jury, I hope that you will not consider these remarks to be misplaced, as it might have happened to any two of us here to have been on that spot and at that hour last night to make the fearful discovery which was made by those two gentlemen."

When the coroner had concluded his address, the jury deliberated but for a few minutes, and came to a verdict of "Wilful Murder against some person or persons unknown."

Thus terminated the proceedings of the coroner's inquest. Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril returned to the hotel at which they were staying; and there they deliberated together what course they should now pursue. The old gentleman at first proposed that being in the neighbourhood, he should pay one more visit to Lady Saxondale, in the hope of being able to induce her to do justice to William Deveril in respect to the calumnies she had propagated against him; for he thought that he might frighten her into this course by revealing the fact of the discovery that she was in correspondence with such a person as Mr. Chiffin. But upon mature reflection Mr. Gunthorpe concluded that Lady Saxondale was a woman of such strong effrontery and brazen hardihood, as not to be intimidated by such means—and that she would indignantly deny the circumstance of the alleged communication with Mr. Chiffin. He therefore resolved to return to London with Deveril, and take time to settle the course which was now to be adopted towards her ladyship.

"But Florina?" suggested William, when his old friend had thus imparted his decision. "Will you leave her in the odious atmosphere of Lady Saxondale's iniquity? Oh, my dear sir! if you do indeed possess any influence in that quarter——"

"Enough, William!" interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe. "I can take no step until I return to London. It must be from thence that I shall write to Lady Macdonald: but I faithfully promise you, William, that within a very few days Florina and her aunt shall cease to be inmates of Saxondale Castle. Will that suffice?"

"It will—it must," answered Deveril. "I submit to your opinion and judgment in all things. But when, sir, do you propose to depart?"

"We will go across to Lincoln presently, after dinner," responded Mr. Gunthorpe; "and to-morrow morning we will start by rail for London. Ah! you rogue, you wish to have an opportunity of seeing Florina for a few minutes?—but it cannot be on the present occasion, William. I have many things requiring my presence in London."

Mr. Gunthorpe had indeed fathomed

our hero's desire: for was it not natural that he should wish to see his well-beloved Florina, if only for a few minutes? and would he not cheerfully have walked across to the grounds of Saxondale Castle in that hope? But he was compelled to bow to Mr. Gunthorpe's decision: and he did so with the best possible grace.

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Mr. Hawkshaw, having called at Saxondale Castle in the morning, to inquire after Lord Harold Staunton's health, had intimated his intention of riding across to Gainsborough to learn the fullest particulars of the terrible tragedy of the previous night. He was present throughout a greater portion of the examination before the coroner, and when the inquest was over, he rode back to Saxondale Castle to communicate all he had learnt. It was close upon the dinner hour when he reached the baronial mansion; and he was of course invited to stay—an invitation which he did not refuse, as the reader scarcely requires to be informed.

"It would appear," he said, when reciting the particulars of the inquest to the ladies assembled in the drawing-room, "that Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril were on their way last night to the castle, when they discovered the murder."

"It may be so," observed Lady Saxondale, drawing herself up haughtily: "but they assuredly would not have been received by me."

Florina, who had started at Mr. Hawkshaw's announcement, now flung a quick glance of indignation at Lady Saxondale as she thus spoke—a glance which her ladyship, however, affected not to perceive.

"I must confess, proceeded Mr. Hawkshaw, who could not understand why Lady Saxondale have spoken in such a manner of Mr. Gunthorpe and our hero—for the rumours and scandals of London life had not reached his ears in Lincolnshire, "that I was exceedingly prepossessed in favour of that Mr. Deveril. He gave his evidence in such a plain straightforward manly style—he is such a handsome youth too—and the coroner paid him the highest compliments."

Had Mr. Hawkshaw been looking at Florina at the time he thus spoke, he would have observed that her looks were fixed upon him with an expression of gratitude which she herself could not at the moment possibly subdue. Oh! how she longed to start up and accuse Lady Saxondale of all the vile perfidy of which she had been guilty: but she dared not. Deveril's earnest injunctions to the contrary restrained her.

At this crisis a footman entered to announce that dinner was served up; and the party accordingly descended to the dining room. After the banquet, Mr. Hawkshaw and Juliana walked out together as usual in the garden, and the moment they were alone, the Squire, said, "Pray tell me, Miss Farefield, was I indiscreet in mentioning the name of Mr. Deveril before your mother? I think that I was—I fear so."

"To tell you the truth," replied Juliana "that same Mr. Deveril has fallen into sad disgrace with my mother; inasmuch as presuming on certain kindness which she showed him, he fancied that she was enamoured of him—and he was arrogant enough——But you understand me—I need say no more."

"Ah! I regret that I should have alluded to him in the eulogistic terms that I did," observed Mr. Hawkshaw. "But I will be more guarded in future. It only shows how one may be deceived in a person. I could have sworn that this William Deveril was one of the finest young fellows in heart as well as in person, I had ever seen in my life; and certainly if I could have got near him through the crowded room, when he had given his testimony, I should have shaken hands with him. But, Ah! here is another arrival at the castle! What a number of visitors her ladyship receives!"

This remark was cited by the sounds of a carriage rolling up to the entrance of the castle: but Juliana, indifferent as to who the arrival might be,—and thinking only of riveting the chains of her fascinations still more strongly than ever around Mr. Hawkshaw's heart,—turned the conversation away from its previous topic, and skilfully began touching on those themes connected with the sports of the field which were so dear to the Squire.

Meanwhile, who was it that had just arrived at the castle? We shall see. But first let us observe that when the post-chaise—for such it was—drove up to the gate, Lady Saxondale was alone in the library, writing some letters. A domestic entered; and handing a card upon a massive silver salver, said, "This gentleman requests to see your ladyship."

The mistress of the mansion took the card—glanced at it—and read the name of Dr. Ferney.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE PHYSICIAN AND THE LADY.

FOR some few weeks past, misfortunes and threatening calamities had seemed to strike Lady Saxondale blow after blow: but as each fresh source of inquietude manifested itself, she had assumed new courage to encounter it. Before any of these menacing casualties first transpired, had it been suddenly foretold to her that so many perils were to rise up in rapid succession before her throughout a coming period of but a few weeks, she would have shrunk appalled from the idea of meeting them—she would have felt that they must prove overwhelming. But she had encountered them nevertheless: she had seen gulf after gulf yawn at her feet—and in the endeavour to stop up one she had with her own hands digged others round about her. All these sources of terror and apprehension had been great; but even as they had multiplied in her path, she had still boldly and resolutely pursued her way—quailing sometimes for a moment, it is true—but plucking up her spirit again, and nerving herself with fresh resolution to encounter all obstacles and grapple with all dangers.

Such, up to this point, had been the history of the past few weeks with Lady Saxondale. But now a peril which she had least anticipated—which she had flattered herself to be most remote of all dangers that she stood even the shadow of a chance of encouraging,—this one had suddenly presented itself before her! For she trembled to the very nethermost confines of her being at the bare thought of being known as Lady Saxondale to Dr. Ferney,—he who hitherto for long, long years, had only known her as plain and simple Mrs. Smith.

Was it any wonder, therefore, if the card dropped from her hand as she took it off the silver salver and caught the name of Dr. Ferney? It did drop, as in from palsied fingers: for the stupor of dismay seized all in a moment upon Lady Saxondale. Yes—it seized upon her in a moment: but its paralyzing effect lasted only for that moment. She recovered her presence of mind as quickly as she had lost it: that is to say, she had recovered it sufficiently to stoop down and pick up the card—a moment which she accomplished so rapidly that it even anticipated that of the servant who likewise stooped to pick it up. The outward and visible evidences of Lady Saxondale's emotions were so transitory—passing in a swift brief instant—that the domestic did not notice them, but thought that it was through a pure accident the card had been thus dropped.

"Show Dr. Ferney into this room," said Lady Saxondale: and though it cost her an almost superhuman effort to speak with a forced calmness, it nevertheless struck her that her voice was hollow and sepulchral—at least it sounded so unto her own ears.

The domestic bowed and withdrew; and the instant he had quitted the library, Lady Saxondale pressed her right hand to her throbbing brows, murmuring, "My God, my God! what will happen next?"

A thunderbolt falling upon her head at that instant would have been mercy: for the wildest, most agonizing terrors were agitating in her brain, as she thought to herself that there was but *one* possible object for which Dr. Ferney could visit her—an object which menaced her with utter annihilation! Suddenly however a brightening, cheering thought flashed in unto her mind. Dr. Ferney loved her—had loved her for many long, long years—was devoted to that mysterious interest of her's which for the instant she had deemed so imperilled; and he would not betray her—no, she felt assured that he would not! At a glance, too, of her mental vision, she reviewed the circumstances of their recent meeting—and how he had solemnly proclaimed his readiness to lay down his life for her rather than breathe a word that should hurt her. She reflected likewise on the amiability of his disposition—the generosity of his nature: and she thought also of the immense power of her own charms—her own fascinations. By the time therefore that the door opened again, Lady Saxondale was herself once more—strong-minded, bold, courageous, resolute—prepared for any emergency. But she remained seated at the table with her back towards the opening door, that a too sudden discovery of her identity on the part of the physician should not elicit from him an ejaculation that would excite the astonishment of the domestic. Nevertheless, Lady Saxondale felt more than half persuaded that the precaution was unnecessary: for must he not have already discovered that Mrs. Smith and Lady Saxondale were one and the same? and was it not on account of this discovery that he had come to visit her now?

"Dr. Ferney," exclaimed the domestic, announcing the physician in the usual way: and then the door of the library closed again.

Lady Saxondale rose from the table: but the instant that Dr. Ferney caught a glimpse of her countenance, he did give vent to an ejaculation of wonder and amazement—and he staggered back as if stricken a fierce blow by the hand of an invisible giant.

"Yes, Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, extending her hand with the most gracious affability towards him: "it is I—and now the mystery is cleared up: Mrs. Smith exists for *you* no longer!"

"Is it possible? is it possible?" murmured the doctor, with confusion in his brain; and he took the proffered hand in a mechanical, unconscious manner.

"My dear friend, pray be seated," said her ladyship. "Come, place yourself on this sofa; and I will sit down by your side. What has procured me the pleasure of your visit!"

"And *you* are Lady Saxondale?" he said, still gazing with a sort of vacant incredulity upon the mistress of the castle; "*you* are Lady Saxondale?"

"And most welcome are you at Saxondale Castle! But do tell me, my dear Dr. Ferney, what has brought you hither? Is there anything amiss? Why do you still gaze upon me in this manner? You really begin to frighten me. Are you not towards me the same kind and devoted friend I have ever thought you?"

"Yes—God grant that I may be enabled to continue so!" was the physician's solemn response: and now he appeared to be recovering somewhat of his wonted self-possession.

"You will hasten to tell me, then, what has brought you hither?" said her ladyship; "for it is evident enough that in seeking Lady Saxondale, you did *not* expect to meet the Mrs. Smith of other times. Therefore I suppose your visit has nothing to do with the circumstances which first rendered us acquainted?"

"No—nothing," rejoined the doctor; and his answer afforded unspeakable relief to Lady Saxondale. "I have come upon quite another business—but a most unpleasant one: and to tell your ladyship the truth, I know not how to break it to you. Yet why should I not? Doubtless you will be enabled to explain it. God grant that you will be so!"

"Pray tell me, my dear friend, what all this means? You are rendering me exceedingly uneasy."

"Listen then," resumed the doctor, "while I explain myself. You know, Lady Saxondale, the passionate devotion I have ever entertained for all those pursuits which are connected with the mysteries of my profession—and that amongst them, that of anatomical research has not been the least, for many years past, I have however practised this branch but little. Excuse me for touching upon such topics: but it is necessary. The other night a dead body was brought to my house: for occasionally I *do* return to that pursuit which was once the most favourite of all. Well, then, Lady Saxondale—a body was brought to my house: it was the corpse of a female—an elderly one; and the moment I beheld it, I was smitten with a suspicion that the deceased had not come fairly by her death. It bore the external evidences of poison—but not of any common poison—a poison of a very subtle and peculiar nature, the evidences of which could only be known to the experienced eye. And my suspicion proved correct: for anatomical research showed me that this woman had died by that very poison which I myself had succeeded in eliminating some weeks back, and which I showed to you on the night you visited me at my house!"

Lady Saxondale had listened in speechless consternation to the physician's words: but it was with a consternation that was felt inwardly rather than shown outwardly—so that he himself observed not the full effects of what he had said.

"Well," he resumed, "you may suppose, Lady Saxondale, that I was horrified on making this discovery—nay, more than horrified—I was bewildered and dismayed. To no human being had I ever given the smallest phial of that poison. I never eliminated it but twice. On the first occasion, the bottle which contained it was broken along with several others, as you must remember, on that night when you visited me in Conduit Street."

"I do remember. It was through my carelessness or awkwardness," said Lady Saxondale: "and you know how sorry I was. But pray proceed."

"On the second occasion when I eliminated the poison, I put my own seal upon the cork of the bottle--and I locked it up in a drawer in a laboratory. That bottle is still there: the cork has not been tampered with—the seal has never been broken. And yet, as sure as I am speaking to you now, that woman died of the very poison which I discovered! That it could have been obtained elsewhere, was impossible. I am too intimately acquainted with all the fruits of chemical research to admit the supposition for a moment, that any other experimentalist has succeeded in eliminating this poison, which is far more powerful than Prussic acid. You may conceive, therefore, how bewildered—how perplexed—how dismayed I was!"

"Naturally so, my dear Dr. Ferney," observed Lady Saxondale, who was herself far more dismayed than ever the physician could have been, although she concealed the outward expression of her terror with a wonderful dissimulation of a mere ordinary interest in what he was reciting.

"I at once repaired," resumed the doctor, "to the person who had procured for me the corpse. From him I obtained the name which was on the coffin of the stolen body. Again I must ask you to forgive me the necessity of touching upon details so indelicate—so nauseating to yourself——"

"Make no apology, doctor," said Lady Saxondale, with every appearance of the utmost affability; "but continue your strange and exciting narrative."

"Provided with the name of the woman," continued the physician, "I, on the following day, when having an hour's leisure, instituted the requisite inquiries at the parochial Registrar's office, and discovered that this woman, Mabel Stewart, died at Saxondale House. I then searched a file of newspapers, and found that an inquest had set upon the body, and that the verdict attributed her death to apoplexy. Now, Lady Saxondale," added the doctor, "there is something horribly and fearfully mysterious in the death of that woman!"

"You astonish me, my dear Dr. Ferney!" cried her ladyship, who had no need to affect dismay: for she had only to suffer the real consternation she had felt, to appear from behind the mask of dissimulation. "Could the unhappy woman have committed suicide?"

"If so, the phial containing the poison must have been found by her side," responded the physician: "but the evidence given on the inquest, clearly proved that no such discovery took place. Death must have been too instantaneous to allow her even a moment's respite to conceal the phial. So soon as one drop—one single drop of that colourless fluid, touched her throat, life was extinct. It is clear beyond the possibility of doubt—too horribly clear indeed—that Mabel Stewart was murdered!"

"Murdered!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale: "and beneath my roof!"

"It was even so," rejoined the doctor in a mournful voice. "But how could the poison have been obtained? Ah, God forgive me if I wrong you, as I am sure I must: but a frightful suspicion arose in my mind——Indeed, it was the only possible means of accounting for an incident which would otherwise be utterly inexplicable——"

"Name that suspicion: what was it, Dr. Ferney?"—and for the second time on the evening of which we are speaking, did Lady Saxondale's voice sound hollow and sepulchral to her own ears.

"I dare not name that suspicion," murmured the physician. "My God! when I look at you, how can I possibly name it?"

"But you *must*, doctor: for I see that there is something to explain away."

"Until this night—as you are aware—I knew not that Mrs. Smith and Lady Saxondale were identical," continued the physician, in a slow and hesitating manner. "But I feared that she who I believed to be Mrs. Smith had taken the phial from my laboratory on that night when she visited me; and that she had carelessly or thoughtlessly communicated the nature of the poison to some one else at Saxondale House—and hence the catastrophe. Therefore, now that I find Mrs. Smith identified with Lady Saxondale, you can full well understand with what diffidence it is that I am compelled to repeat my suspicion to your face—that your ladyship took away that bottle of poison with you on that particular night!"

"Dr. Ferney, can you believe me capable of having used the venom for a murderous purpose?"—and Lady Saxondale spoke in a voice of mild and melancholy rebuke: for she knew the physician's character too well to assume indignation with him.

"Oh, tell me that you took the phial," he said, with far greater excitement than it was his wont to display; "and that it must have fallen into villanous and unscrupulous hands! Tell me this—tell me anything that will still enable me to contemplate you on that high pedestal which you have ever occupied in my mind!"

"Well, then, my dear Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, taking his hand, and looking in an appealing manner up into his countenance, "I must plead guilty to that little act which you have named. I will not stigmatize myself with the commission of a theft—because in respect to a friend such as you, it cannot be regarded in that light: but it was through curiosity that I took it. You know how deeply interested I felt in your discoveries——"

"Ah! but now that I bethink me," interrupted Dr. Ferney, "I cannot feel otherwise than deeply, deeply grieved to hear that you *did* take that phial. The deed was not well," he continued in a tone of exceeding mournfulness and with corresponding looks. "It almost makes me regret, Lady Saxondale, that I lent myself to that transaction which nineteen years ago——"

"For God's sake," murmured the unhappy woman, clasping her hands appealingly, and casting her shuddering looks around, "do not allude to it. The very walls have ears. Oh, my dear Dr. Ferney! did you not assure me but a short time back, at your house, that my secret was sacred—that it was my own mystery, into which you would never seek to penetrate? I beseech and implore that you will not fly from your word!"

"But what am I to do in this present case? Let us think no more of the past for the moment. Here, Lady Saxondale, has a foul murder come to my knowledge. It is a murder perpetrated by means of a venom which I myself discovered, and I also am made the discoverer of the awful tragedy it has produced. The finger of God is in all this: it is heaven itself which is prompting me on to bring to justice the perpetrator of that crime! What then, I ask, am I to do? This crime was committed under your roof. God forbid that I should attribute it to you! No—it were impossible! If you then be guiltless, will you not aim me in fixing upon the guilty one?"

"Oh, but all this is most dreadful!" murmured Lady Saxondale, still with clasped hands—still with appealing looks—still with ineffable anguish in every lineament of her pale countenance. "If an exposure be made, must I not confess that I purloined the phial of poison from your house? What will be thought of me? I shall be ruined! A lady who visits a single man stealthily—who is admitted by him into all the mysteries of his laboratory——Ah, Dr. Ferney have mercy upon me—I beseech you to have mercy upon me!—or else take a dagger and plunge it into this bosom!"

Lady Saxondale did not throw herself upon her knees as she thus spoke: but her anguish was truly unfeigned—her inquietude was too great not to render her affliction genuine. As she sat by the physician's side upon the sofa, she leant towards him with an agony of appeal in her looks, her attitude, and her gestures; and as she gave utterance to the closing words of her well-nigh frenzied speech, she pressed her hands convulsively to that bosom for which she invoked the dagger as an alternative rather than an exposure.

"Oh, my God! what am I to do?" murmured the physician: and half-averting his countenance, he raised one hand to his pale forehead. "what am I to do!"

"What are you to do?" cried Lady Saxondale. "Bury the subject in oblivion!"

"I cannot—I dare not," responded Ferney, shaking his head solemnly, but with a look of the deepest affliction. "If I conceal my knowledge of this crime, I become as it were an accessary to it: and how shall I ever satisfy my own conscience? But tell me, Lady Saxondale, do your suspicions fall upon any one in your household? Reflect—consider—to whom did you ever impart the secret of that subtle poison? You *must* have spoken of it to some one: tell me who it was! For the voice of that murdered woman cries up to heaven for vengeance; and heaven itself has marked me as its instrument in bringing the murderer to justice. Nay, more—does it not almost seem as if there were retribution in all this ?—as if I had penetrated too deeply into the mysteries of nature—had dragged forth unholy secrets—had tasted of the forbidden tree of knowledge—and am now to be punished for my fault ? For think you not, Lady Saxondale, that it will be a cruel ordeal for me to proclaim all this to the knowledge of justice and involve *your* name in the transaction ?"

"Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, now suddenly recalling to mind her predetermination to assert her empire over him through the medium of that love of which she knew herself to be the object,—"I believe you once entertained something like a feeling of friendship towards me—perhaps more than friendship——"

"Yes, yes : it was more—it *is* more !" interrupted the physician ; "for the sentiment is deathless ! Need I tell you that from the first moment I beheld you at my mother's house nineteen years ago, your image has never been absent from my mind ? You know it—you know it. I gave you that assurance the other day, when you visited my house : and it is the truth—as I repeat it again this evening ! But there is a duty, Lady Saxondale, which I have to perform ; and though my own heart should break in accomplishing that duty—though it should crush me down with sorrow into the dust to drag your name before the tribunals of the country—yet what alternative have I ? Alas ! that duty must be performed ! Tell me therefore —on whom must our suspicions settle themselves ?"

"Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, "do not tell me that you ever entertained the slightest love for me. No, no—it is impossible—you could not ! If you had, you would not torment me thus now. Good God ! do you not comprehend the immensity of the evil you will work ?"

"I see but two things which can tell against you," answered the doctor. "The first is that you visited my house. Surely the purity of your own life, and my unsullied reputation, will combine to disarm scandal in that respect ? And after all, may not a lady visit a physician ? Then, as for your taking the phial—the deed can be well explained as arising from the curiosity of the moment. It is not a watch—nor a purse—nor a jewel—nor anything valuable ; and Lady Saxondale need not fear the positive imputation of dishonesty on that account."

"Nevertheless, I conjure you, my dear Dr. Ferney, not to urge this matter. Yes—I entreat, I implore you," continued Lady Saxondale, in accents of the most earnest pleading, "not to bring it before the world !"

"Oh ! what would you have me think?" exclaimed the physican, suddenly fastening looks of mingled horror and uncertainty upon Lady Saxondale. "No, no—suffer not such a terrible suspicion to remain in my mind. For your own sake, therefore, lose not a moment in furnishing the clue to the unravelment of this mystery."

"But that suspicion which has struck you," said her ladyship, aghast and trembling.

"It is a hideous one—and every moment does it become stronger," rejoined Ferney. "Indeed, there is an excitement in my mind such as for years I have not experienced. Would to heaven that all this had not occurred."

"Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, in tones that were now really hollow and sepulchral—not to her own ear alone, but to that of the physician,—"you are dragging me on to a revelation which I shudder to contemplate."

"Oh ! then my suspicion is confirmed," murmured the medical man, in accents that were low, deep, and full of horror.

"If you have ever loved me, Dr. Ferney," said the wretched Lady Saxondale, sinking upon her knees before him, "could you find it in your heart to send me to the scaffold ?"

There was a burst of anguish from Dr. Ferney's lips : and starting from his seat, he began pacing the room to and fro in terrible agitation. Lady Saxondale, whom he had left kneeling at the sofa whence he had risen, slowly raised herself from that suppliant posture ; and advancing towards him, extended her arms, murmuring in half smothered accents, "Mercy, mercy !"

The doctor stopped short. He gazed upon that woman whom he had loved so long—so truly—so enduringly : his thoughts were reflected back to those by-gone years when he had first seen her in the bloom of her youthful beauty ; and as he beheld her now in the glory of her splendid womanhood, all the freshness of the passion which had been inspired *then*, was resuscitated now. Yet shuddered he not as he reflected that this woman—the object of his love—was a murderess? Recoiled he not from the presence of her upon whose soul lay the weight of so tremendous a crime? He had felt shocked: but the sentiment of horror was absorbed in the profundity of that strange romantic passion which his heart cherished towards her. It was a passion stronger than himself—a passion which had no hope and no aim—which subsisted not upon expectation—but was in itself eternal, deathless, immortal. Yes, it was a love such as the human heart has seldom known—perhaps never knew before!

With intense anxiety did Lady Saxondale watch the features of the physican as they stood face to face in the middle of the room. Her experienced eye showed her that he was melting in her favour; and her heart bounded with a feeling of relief and the certainty of triumph.

"There must have been some terrible circumstances, Lady Saxondale," he said, at length breaking silence, and speaking slowly, "to have led you on to such a deed as that!"

"Yes—terrible circumstances," was the quick response: "but do not force me to give utterance to them!"

"One word!" ejaculated the doctor, as a thought suddenly struck him. "When you were at my mother's house, you had a servant with you whom you called Mary. Was she this same one whose real name appears to have been Mabel?"

"The same," responded Lady Saxondale.

"I begin to understand. She doubtless threatened some exposure with regard to that mystery the purpose of which I have sworn never to penetrate? And therein I will keep my word!"

"You have conjectured the whole truth," was Lady Saxondale's reply. "And now, my dear Dr. Ferney, may I still regard you as my warmest, my best friend?—may I look upon you as my saviour? Oh! do not, do not hesitate to give me this assurance."

"Lady Saxondale," answered the physician, solemnly, "I fear that for you I am perilling my immortal soul!"

"What proof can I give you of my gratitude? Oh! tell me what proof?"

"There is nothing—nothing," replied the doctor, in a grave and mournful voice. "I could not do you an injury—no, I could not! I feel that I must risk everything and dare everything, alike here and hereafter, sooner than involve you in peril. But, Oh! Lady Saxondale, for heaven's sake take warning by what has passed!"

"I will, I will!" she exclaimed: "your advice shall not be lost upon me. Oh, Dr. Ferney, I am entirely in your hands—I am at your mercy,—I am in your power. May I rely upon your solemn sacred promise not to betray me?"

"You may," was his answer."

"But if a period of remorse should seize upon you," resumed Lady Saxondale, still in the hurried voice of excitement,—"if you should think better of this pledge that you have given——"

"Fear not," he interrupted her, gently, but firmly "from the past you may judge whether I am a man who will fly from his word. No, Lady Saxondale—even upon my death-bed will I keep your secret: and may heaven forgive me for so doing!"

"The gratitude of my life is your's. And now that we may turn away from this sad, sad topic," continued Lady Saxondale, "will you not accept the hospitality of the castle? Believe me, my dear Dr. Ferney, I could receive no more welcome guest than one who has proved himself so kind a friend to me.

"No, Lady Saxondale," he answered, not coldly nor distantly—but mournfully and gravely: "I must not remain here. The less we see of each other in the world, the better. You would feel embarrassed in my presence, knowing that I possessed this secret of your's. And I——but no matter. Farewell."

And with this abrupt adieu, Dr. Ferney grasped Lady Saxondale's hand for a moment, and hurried from the room.

Thus terminated this strange scene; and a few minutes afterwards, the physician was being borne away in the post-chaise from Saxondale Castle.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE JUDGE AND JURY SOCIETY.

On the same evening when the scene above described took place at the castle in Lincolnshire, Lord Saxondale was dining by himself at the mansion in Park Lane. He felt lonely, dull, and dispirited. He had broken with the friend whom be liked best of all his acquaintances—indeed, the only one with whom he had ever been exceedingly intimate: for notwithstanding his rank, his position, and his wealth, there were very few young men in his own sphere, who had chosen to associate much with him. It was not that his pride was too overweening—that his bearing was too arrogant—or his manners too supercilious: but because he was altogether considered a disagreeable and uncompanionable young man. So far as his arrogance, his vanity, his conceit, and his insufferable pride were concerned, there were many young scions of the Aristocracy who possessed all those faults: indeed few were without them: but then they had some redeeming qualities—or at least some which met each other's approval; whereas Edmund Saxondale had none of these. He was generally looked upon as a miserable coxcomb—without courage to back up the pride which he assumed. On two or three occasions, when in the society of young men, he had put up with insults which every one else would have indignantly resented: and thus he had drawn down upon himself the contempt of those who would otherwise have gladly sought his society for his rank and his money. An allusion has been made in a recent chapter to the last insult of the kind which he had received without seeking what in fashionable life is termed "satisfaction:" and as this was the most flagrant instance that had occurred in respect to him, he had become more talked about than ever as a downright coward. On the day after his breach with Emily Archer and Lord Harold Staunton he had visited a billiard-room in Bond Street, where he found himself, if not exactly cut, at least treated with such marked coldness by the gentlemen present that not even his vanity could blind his eyes to the circumstance; and he had speedily left the place in bitterest mortification.

We now find him, as stated at the commencement of this chapter, dining alone at Saxondale House. He had written in the morning to two or three acquaintances to invite them to dinner: but from each he had received a letter of refusal, couched in terms coldly courteous, and without alleging any reason for thus declining. No wonder, therefore, was it that he felt dispirited and discontented. Addicted though he was to wine, he could not enjoy it now. He knew not what to do with himself. This was the third day since his breach with Emily; and he had remained indoors almost entirely since the little demonstration at the billiard-table. He was horribly *ennuye*; he knew not what to do with himself. He had no intellectual resources; and even the last three-volume novel issued from some West End publisher's establishment, failed to amuse him. He now missed both Harold Staunton and Emily Archer. He regretted having quarrelled with them. He was ignorant that his late mistress had left London—equally ignorant of the terrible fate which had befallen her; inasmuch as there had not as yet been time for an account of the tragedy to appear in the London newspapers.

As he sat sipping his wine, more from habit than because he really liked it on the present occasion, he said to himself, "I have an uncommon great mind to go and see Emily, and endeavour to make it up with her. What if she was really unfaithful to me? She is only like the rest of them; and I certainly could not find a handsomer mistress. Besides, after all, she was an amusing girl enough; and we got on very well together till that cursed affair took place. I was in a terrible rage at the time: but it was enough to make me so. Yes: I will go and see her; for this is such precious dull work! I shall be glad to make it up with her, even if she had behaved twice as badly."

Having come to this resolution, Lord Saxondale issued forth; and taking a cab from the nearest stand in Oxford Street, he proceeded to Holloway. Not knowing exactly how his visit might terminate, he ordered the cabman to wait for farther instructions. Indeed, he fancied that Emily was not at home, from the circumstance of no lights appearing in the front windows. On knocking at the door, the summons was answered by the cook, who was dressed out in her gayest apparel: for she had the coachman, the groom, and some other friends to sup with her and make merry during her mistress's absence—that mistress who was never to return!

"Is Miss Archer within?" asked Saxondale.

"No, my lord—missus has gone out of town," was the reply.

"Gone out of town," he exclaimed. "When was that?"

"The morning after you was last here, my lord."

"And the maid gone with her?"

The response was in the affirmative.

"And where has she gone to?"

"Well, my lord, to tell your lordship the truth, she has gone down into Lincolnshire; and from what the maid told me, I think to Saxondale Castle."

"With Lord Harold?" demanded Edmund, more and more astonished.

"Oh, no, my lord," replied the cook. "The fact is, there was a terrible row after you left t'other night: for it seems that Lord Harold had got upstairs quite unbeknown to missus—and she called him all kinds of names; so that he went off in high dudgeon."

"Ah! is thus the case!" said the young nobleman: then in a musing tone, he observed. "After all, I was wrong to quarrel with Emily. However, I must think of what's to be done. I shall most likely call here again to-morrow:"—and with this intimation he took his departure.

Re-entering the cab, he ordered the driver to take him back into London; and while rolling along, he said to himself—"Perhaps Emily fancied that I should cut off into Lincolnshire, and she has gone to look after me. Or perhaps she means to complain to my mother of the treatment she has received at my hands? And yet she would hardly be such a fool as to run on a wild-goose chase, without being previously certain that I had left London: and as to carrying her complaints to my lady-mother, that is most unlike Emily Archer. No, there is something in all this I can't understand. Shall I cut into Lincolnshire after her? or shall I wait until she comes back? I think I had better wait: for we might cross each other. Yes—I will wait."

Having come to this resolve, Lord Saxondale turned his thoughts upon another subject. This was neither more nor less than the important matter of how he was to pass the evening. He revolved in his mind all the various places of amusement,—dismissing them however one after the other, until he suddenly recollected that there was one of which he had heard a great deal—which he and Lord Harold had frequently thought of visiting—but which somehow or another had escaped the honour of their presence.

Thrusting his head out of the window, he said to the cabman, "Drive to the *Garrick's Head* in Bow street."

In due course Lord Saxondale reached the far-famed hostelry; and dismissing the cab, he made his way up into a spacious room, where a numerous company was assembled, and where the Judge and Jury Society held its sittings. One portion of the room was fitted up in miniature imitation of a court of justice. There was the bench, with the little desk for the judge—there was the table for the barristers—there was the witness-box—and there was a particular table set exclusively apart for the accommodation of those acting as jurymen. The door of this room was kept by an usher wearing the official robe, and whose aspect was as grave and serious as befitted the functions he had to fulfil.

At the numerous tables in this apartment, the visitors were seated—discussing cigars, and drinking the liquors suited to their respective means of tastes. Some were indulging in wine—others were paying their respects to the various compounds of which brandy, gin, rum, and whisky severally formed the chief ingredients—while others, again, were slaking their thirst with the excellent malt liquor dispensed at the house. There was a general air of blitheness—a making up of the mind to enter into the enjoyments of the evening—and a pervasive feeling of certainty that these would prove of the richest and raciest description. Lord Saxondale seated himself at a table near the judicial bench, and called for a bottle of champagne—an order which was highly satisfactory to the waiter, and convinced the guests who heard it, that the new-comer was "a cut above the generality of them."

Three or four individuals in gowns, wigs, and white bands, and looking as if they had just arrived from Westminster Hall, now entered the apartment and took their seats at the table appropriated to the barristers. They carried in their hands bundles of papers duly tied round with red tape, and having as completely the air of "briefs" as if their connexion with John Doe and Richard Roe were an actual fact instead of an agreeable fiction. In a most lawyer-like style, too, did these gentlemen who performed the part of barristers, untie the tapes—arrange their papers before them—take great dips of ink with long feathery pens—and make endorsements upon their pseudo-briefs, writing down imaginary fees in real figures.

Presently the usher of the court threw the door wide open, shouting in a stentorian voice, "Silence and hats off, for the Lord Chief Baron!"

These mandates were at once complied with: but there was a general sensation as the object of this ceremony, ascending the stairs, made his appearance, if not as a real judge, at least in the garb and with the gravity of one. This was Mr. Nicholson—the landlord of the tavern, and the presiding genius of the Judge and jury Society. No ordinary character in his way, is the personage just introduced. He is a man of good intellectual acquirements, of agreeable manners, and of great conversational powers. He has a readiness of wit, a facility of good-natured sarcasm, and a tact in seizing upon any passing incident to render it available for his purposes—which admirably qualify him for the judicial part which he thus enacts. He is a really clever man, and as ready at his pen as with his tongue. In private life he bears the character of a liberality, a generosity, and a kindness of heart, which have often made him lose sight of his own interests in ministering to the wants of others. Lord Chief Baron Nicholson is therefore not only "a capital fellow" in the man-about-town acceptance of the term, but in its most true and literal meaning. In personal appearance he is short and stout—a living evidence of the good qualities of his own larder. Of convivial disposition, his ample countenance beams with a natural *bonhommie* which he cannot possibly subdue even when putting on the gravity of the judge: at all events if he were a real judge and presided at the old Bailey, it would need but a single glance at his countenance to convince the culprit brought before him that justice would assuredly be tempered with mercy.

But to return to our narrative: the Lord Chief Baron entered the apartment which we have above described; and with measured steps he ascended to the judicial bench. There he bowed to the bar, and the bar bowed to him: so that if it were not for the evidences of conviviality abounding upon the several tables, the spectators might really have fancied themselves in the presence of all the real ceremony and grave formality of a court of justice.

Having deposited himself upon the bench, the Lord Chief Baron exclaimed, "Waiter!"

Yes, my lord," replied one of his own tavern-functionaries.

"A glass of brandy-and-water and a cigar," said the great legal luminary:—and thereupon a general laugh ensued throughout the room.

When the judicial wants were duly supplied, and the havennah in the judicial lips was emitting its fragrant vapours, the clerk of the court announced the case that was for trial. It was a civil action that was thus to occupy attention: and a number of the guests having been sworn in as jurymen, one of the gentlemen officiating as the barrister, opened the proceedings. It is not our purpose to give any description of the subject-matter of the trial; because in a mere narrative form it would lose the greater portion of its interest. But we must observe that the persons officiating as barristers, acquitted themselves with no ordinary degree of talent—delivering speeches which for their easy and continuous flow, might have made the orators the subject of envy on the part of many a stammering, shuttering, thick-pated practitioner at Westminster Hall. Witnesses were examined; and these kept the company in a continual roar of laughter. From time to time the Lord Chief Baron himself seasoned the proceedings with some witty interjections, which added to the general merriment. But the cream of the whole affair was the judicial summing up. Sparkling wit, exquisite humour, sly sarcasm, and a perfect assumption of the air and manner of the real judge, characterized the Lord Chief Baron's part of the performance. There was one incident that told admirably. It happened that the individuals acting as jurymen, drank somewhat more than was good for them; and in plain terms, grew very intoxicated. The Lord Chief Baron addressed them as an intelligent and enlightened body of men—men representing the wisdom of the country—men who indeed for the time being constituted "the country," the matter at issue between the plaintiff and defendant being, in legal parlance, "tried by God and their country." The solemn gravity with which the Lord Chief Baron thus addressed his drunken jury—and the vacant stare as well as the tipsy swaying to and fro with which the said jurymen listened to the great functionary—formed by no means the least ludricrous portion of the comedy.

When we observe that though these proceedings lasted two hours and a half, without for a single moment flagging into dullness or waning into insipidity—and when we add that from first to last the spectators experienced unfailing amusement—those of our readers who have never visited the Judge and Jury Society, will be enabled to understand how well sustained the spirit and interest of the proceedings must be.*

Lord Saxondale waited until the end, when he adjourned to the supper-room below; and there he invited the Lord Chief Baron, the barristers, the clerk of the court, and the witnesses, to sup with him. The conviviality was kept up until a somewhat late hour; and if it had not been that a couple of waiters conveyed Lord Saxondale into a cab, he never could have reached it of his own accord.

Edmund slept until a late hour on the following day; and when he descended to the breakfast parlour, it was with a racking headache and an accompanying depression of spirits. The morning newspapers lay upon the table. He took up one; and almost the very first announcement upon which his eyes fell, was that of a horrible and mysterious murder committed in Lincolnshire. He read on: and callous, indifferent, emotionless though he naturally was, it was nevertheless with dismay and horror that he thus learnt the particulars of the frightful tragedy which had occurred on the bank of the Trent. The journal concluded its account by stating that the whole affair was involved in the deepest mystery, suspicion attaching to no known person. And mysterious was it indeed to Edmund Saxondale: nor could he of course form the slightest conjecture as to the author or authors of the crime.

Having hastily dressed himself, he proceeded without delay to Evergreen Villa. The intelligence had already reached the cook, the groom, and the coachman,—the newspaper having likewise been their informant. Consternation and dismay prevailed at the villa: and indeed great was the excitement throughout the neighbourhood, it being known that the mistress of the house and her attendant maid had met with their death under such mysterious circumstances in Lincolnshire. Some relations of the unfortunate Emily Archer, and who dwelt in London, made their appearance at the villa soon after Lord Saxondale's arrival there; and they took possession of the house and all the property it contained. After some little deliberation, it was decided that one of them—an uncle—should proceed without delay into Lincolnshire and bring up the corpses for the purposes of respectable interment.

Dispirited, and with gloom sitting heavily upon his soul, Edmund quitted the villa and returned to Saxondale House, his mind filled with the awful tragedy which had taken place under such extraordinary and unaccountable circumstances.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

MR. GUNTHORPE'S VISITS.

IN the neighbourhood of Stamford Hill was a handsome residence situated in the midst of spacious grounds, and commanding a beautiful view of all the surrounding scenery. This house after remaining unoccupied for some time, had within the last three weeks become the abode of Gunthorpe. The moment he had decided upon taking it, he lost no time in fitting it up in a very handsome manner. Everything this gentleman did might appear to the shallow observer to be done on the impulse of the moment; but it was not so. The key to the reading of his character was this: that he made up his mind quickly, yet not without as much deliberation as the incident of the moment might deserve: and when once he had resolved how to proceed, he lost no time in carrying out his plans. Thus the very day after he had taken Stamford Manor—as it was called—waggon-loads of the costliest furniture arrived at the place. He did not fit up the house by degrees, nor even take a week to do it: his orders were given at the moment to upholsterers whose warehouses furnished proof of their competency for the commission; and as money to Mr. Gunthorpe was no object, his will and pleasure were promptly executed.

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* At the time of which we are writing (1844) Lord Chief Baron Nicholson illuminated the *Garrick's Head*, with his presence: but at the present period (1852) he shines in undimmed glory at the *Coal Hole* avern.

A few days after his return from Lincolnshire, and at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, Mr. Gunthorpe entered his carriage, and drove to a pretty little cottage situated at no great distance from the manor. The moment his modest equipage stopped at the door, little Charley Leyden, nicely dressed, and full of joyous spirits, bounded forth to welcome the benefactor of his mother and sister. Henrietta herself was likewise speedily seen upon the threshold to greet Mr. Gunthorpe; and the old gentleman was introduced into a neat little parlour, where Mrs. Leyden, considerably improved in health, received him with a degree of warmth which was due to one who had dragged her forth from the depth of poverty.

" I am come to have half-an-hour's chat with you Mrs. Leyden," said Mr. Gunthorpe, " respecting a certain matter you spoke to me about some days ago:"—and he glanced slily towards Henrietta, who, blushing deeply, rose to leave the room. " No—you needn't go!" cried the old gentleman. " On the contrary—you are a very necessary person to the present conference. But you, Master Charley, can run out and play in the garden till you are sent for," he added, patting the child kindly upon the cheek.

" Oh! do let me stay," said Charley. " I am so fond of being where you are, I did not much like you at first," he went on to observe with boyish ingenuousness: " but since I knew you better——"

" Hush, Charley—hush!" interrupted Mrs. Leyden, somewhat severely. " You should not speak in this manner."

" My dear madam, let him speak as he will," said Mr. Gunthorpe: " everything he utters comes up from his heart. You are a good little boy, Charley; and here is something to buy a toy with," he added, placing a five shilling piece in his hand.

" But I would rather stay with you than have that, if you mean me to go away," said the child pouting his pretty lips and looking as if he were going to cry.

" You must run out and play a little by yourself for the present," said Mr. Gunthorpe, kissing him; " and if you do, you shall come and stay a whole day with me at my house."

Charley's countenance now brightened up; and he willingly left the room, making the crown-piece with him.

" Now, my dear girl," said Mr. Gunthorpe, turning to Henrietta, " I am going to devote my attention to your affairs: for you see I have constituted myself your guardian, as it were—and therefore I must attend to your interest. Now, don't blush and look confused, Henrietta: there is nothing to be ashamed of in an honourable love—and nobody will be more delighted than myself to behold these bright prospects realized. I presume, madam, he continued, turning towards Mrs. Leyden, " that you have not as yet been to see this young man who claims to be the heir of the title and estates of Everton?"

" If you remember, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Mrs. Leyden, " you counselled me to take no step in the matter until you had the time to look into it yourself."

" True! I recollect! It was the best course to be adopted. But I suppose, young Miss, that you have occasionally visited that cottage which you tell me is so picturesquely situated at no great distance hence?"

" Henrietta has called there three or four times," observed Mrs. Leyden. " I believe that you consented that she should do so?"

" Oh! certainly: I saw no objection," said Mr. Gunthorpe. " That Mrs. Chandos of whom Henrietta spoke did her a great service in delivering her from Beech-Tree Lodge. And by the bye, I am quite anxious to behold this heroine. But I thought you told me they were going off in such a violent hurry into the country, somewhere down into Wales?—and that is a fortnight ago."

" Yes: but Adolphus—I mean the true Lord Everton," said Henrietta, hesitating and blushing, " has been so very unwell again, that they were compelled to postpone their journey —although it was with great reluctance; for they were most anxious ——"

" Yes, naturally so," interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe.

" It is Lady Everton in Wales," observed Henrietta, " that they are going to see."

" Yes—naturally so," repeated the old gentleman; and he looked abstracted: but quickly recovering himself, he said, " And now tell me, Henrietta —the more you see of this young man——"

" The more she finds that she likes him," replied Mrs. Leyden, speaking on behalf of her daughter, who again seemed full of confusion.

"Well, that's natural also," cried Mr. Gunthorpe. "But you tell me that he has been ill again?"

"His intellects have completely recovered their healthy tone," responded Henrietta: but his physical strength is not so fully restored. When the medical man was informed that he meditated this long journey, he forbade it for the present. Enough was told to the physician to make him understand that it was a journey for an object likely to be attended with no ordinary degree of excitement; and therefore he insisted upon Adolphus postponing it for two or three weeks, that he might acquire physical as well as mental strength sufficient for the occasion."

"And he did wisely," said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Mrs. Chandos and her brother are exceedingly kind to him——"

"Her brother?" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "I do not recollect your having before mentioned this brother. Who is he? what is he? I hope, for his own sake that your Adolphus has fallen into good hands?"

"Oh, yes! there cannot be the slightest doubt of it!" exclaimed Henrietta. "Mrs. Chandos behaves to him as if she were a sister: and Francis Paton ——"

"Eh? what name did you say?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe, with a sort of start, as if he had not caught the words from the young girl's lips.

"Francis Paton," she repeated. "He is quite a youth—not more than eighteen——"

"Ah! And pray what age may his sister, this Mrs. Chandos, be?"

"About twenty-six," answered Henrietta.

"Twenty-six? and her brother eighteen?" said Mr. Gunthorpe in a musing tone. "What is this Francis Paton? Nothing, I suppose. He is doubtless well off?"

"His sister Mrs. Chandos appears comfortably circumstanced: but her brother Frank," continued Henrietta, "is totally dependent on her. For I believe that he has been a page in the service of Lady Saxondale——"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe: "a page in the service of lady Saxondale? But however, I shall go and see these persons at once. Don't think, Henrietta, my dear girl," he added, in a kind voice, and stopping short when about to leave the room with a precipitation which he often manifested, and which would have helped to lead persons to suppose that he was of an impulsive character, "do not think I say, that I am going to find out objections and raise imaginary obstacles in the way of your happiness. No such thing! I hope most sincerely for *your* sake, that all you have told me will turn out perfectly correct."

"Oh! my dear sir," cried Miss Leyden. "I am incapable of telling you an untruth!"

"I know it," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "I did not mean that I was going to inquire whether you had told me the truth—but whether everything is as you have been led to believe it—whether, in short, this young man's lofty notions are real and not visionary. I dare say, however, they are real enough: for I myself happen to know something of his uncle—or of him whom he believes to be his uncle, whichever it may be: and what I do know of that man, is not altogether to his credit," added Mr. Gunthorpe, with a degree of bitterness that he has not often wont to display. "Many, many years have elapsed since he and I met. He was plain Mr. Everton then. But perhaps you will be surprised, Henrietta, when I tell you that I have seen your Adolphus—granting him to be the same——"

"You have seen him?" ejaculated Henrietta.

"Yes: but it was in his childhood, many years ago. He was then a beautiful boy, with dark eyes and hair ——"

"He has dark eyes and hair!" said Henrietta, with a smile and a blush,—the smile being one of joy, for the innocent maiden thought that the identity was thus completely established between her Adolphus and the one of whom Mr. Gunthorpe was speaking.

"I think" said the old gentlemman, in a grave and solemn voice, "that I should recognize his lineaments, though more than sixteen years have elapsed since I beheld him—and then he was but twelve years old."

"Sixteen and twelve are twenty-eight—and Adolphus is twenty-eight" cried Henrietta, with increasing satisfaction.

"Ah, I see that you love him!" said Mr. Gunthorpe; "and no matter whether he be the real Lord Everton or not, if he is a worthy young man ——"

"Alas! consider all his sufferings," murmured Henrietta, the tears starting into her eyes. "For sixteen years was he the inmate of a place that to him was a prison. He has seen too little of a life to have learnt any of its evil ways."

"That captivity," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, with a deeper gravity than before, "is in itself almost a sufficient proof that he is the real Lord Everton. Oh! what guilt does that man—his uncle—have to answer for! But I must now delay not. Farewell for the present. I shall call again on my way homeward: as I dare say a certain young lady," he added, looking archly at Henrietta, "will be anxious to know the result of my interview."

Thus speaking, Mr. Gunthorope, quitted the room; and was hurrying forth to his carriage, when he recollected that he was not exactly acquainted with the whereabouts of the cottage to which he was about to proceed. He therefore returned for the requisite explanation, which Henrietta speedily gave him. He then entered his vehicle, having directed the coachman whither to proceed. The distance was not long; and in a short time the equipage drove up to the front of Lady Bess's picturesque cottage.

We should here remind the reader that Henrietta had not informed either her mother or Mr. Gunthorpe of the *one* incident on that memorable night of her release from Beech-Tree Lodge, which had for the time being filled her bosom with injurious suspicions against Lady Bess, whom she only knew as Mrs. Chandos. Consequently Mr. Gunthorpe was unacquainted with anything to the prejudice of this amazonian heroine. And the reader must likewise recollect that Lady Bess had, by her sophistry, explained away those suspicions from Henrietta's mind, on the first occasion when the young girl called at the cottage.

But to continue our tale. When Mr. Gunthorpe's carriage drove up to the door, Rosa the servant-woman, immediately came forth; and on the old gentleman giving his name, he was at once introduced into the tastefully furnished little parlour: for that name was known at the cottage—and honourably known too, on account of all that Henrietta Leyden had said in connexion with it. Elizabeth Chandos and her brother Francis Paton were alone together in the parlour at the time when Mr. Gunthorpe was thus introduced. They rose to receive him: but they were struck by the singular degree of interest with which he surveyed them. He did not speak a word: his lips moved—it was evident that something unspoken was wavering upon them—but to which he could not give utterance. To their farther surprise, mingled with alarm, he tottered to a seat, and sank upon it, saying, "A glass of water—give me a glass of water—I am ill."

There was a decanter on the little side-board, and Lady Bess, hastening to fill a tumbler, presented it to Mr. Gunthorpe, who merely drank a few drops—and then, speedily recovering, said, "Forgive the trouble I am occasioning: but the heat of the weather is quite overpowering. I felt as if I were about to faint."

"Do you feel better now, sir?" asked Lady Bess in a kind voice. "Is there anything we can do for you? Frank, run and get up some wine——"

"No: do not give yourself the trouble," exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe. "I never touch it in the middle of the day——Besides, I am altogether well now. Where is your guest—Lord Everton I mean——"

"He is in his own room," said Frank. "I will fetch him. He was with us a few minutes back——"

"No: do not call him immediately," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "I wish to say a few words to you two:"—and he again looked first at Lady Bess, then at Francis Paton—then back again at the amazonian lady—with a singular interest in his gaze.

"You rendered an immense service to a young girl in whom I am interested," he continued after a pause, taking Lady Bess's hand and pressing it warmly—most warmly—in his own. "Accept my best thanks for what you did upon the occasion. And now give me your hand, Francis Paton," he said: and when he received that hand, he pressed it as kindly and as fervently as he had done the sister's.

Lady Bess and Frank had heard from Henrietta that Mr. Gunthorpe had strange ways about him, but possessed the most generous of hearts; and thus they were by *no* means annoyed at whatsoever eccentricity of conduct he appeared to display on this occasion. They felt that he was a gentleman with whom they could at once find themselves on a friendly and familiar footing; they even experienced sentiments which seemed to draw them towards him, and give them pleasure at the kindness with which he pressed their hands and bent his looks upon them. But then they had heard such excellent accounts of him from Henrietta: and therefore it appeared perfectly natural that they should like, and even love, anybody who was good to that artless young maiden whom they both loved and liked as a sister.

"Now, I dare say you will think me a very strange person," said Mr. Gunthorpe: "but I am sure you will not fancy me an impertinent one, when I ask you a few questions. Be assured it is entirely in your own interest that I shall interrogate you. You, Francis Paton, have been a page at Lady Saxondale's—have you not?"

"I have sir—and likewise at Court," responded the youth.

"At Court?" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe. "Ah! indeed? And pray by whose interest did you obtain that post?"

Frank glanced at his sister to ascertain from her looks what reply he should make; and she at once said for him, "There is every reason to believe, Mr. Gunthorpe, that it was through Lord Petersfield's interest my brother obtained his appointment in the Royal household: but it is absolutely certain that through that nobleman's recommendation he was introduced into the service of Lady Saxondale."

"Lord Petersfield—eh?" said Mr. Gunthorpe, in a musing tone. "But I suppose you have some prospects—money to receive—or something of that sort—have you not Frank?"

"Nothing, that I am aware of," was the youth's reply: and now both he and his sister surveyed Mr. Gunthorpe with a feeling of increasing interest—for they could not think that these questions were put without some serious motive.

"Nothing—eh?" he said, with a peculiar and incomprehensible look. "But you, Elizabeth——You see that I make myself quite at home with you, calling you by your christian names ——However, you must at once regard me as your friend—from all that Henrietta has told me I wish you to look upon me as such. But I was about to ask some question: it was addressed to you, Elizabeth. I suppose you have received a fortune——eh? Come, tell me all about it now?"

Lady Bess blushed deeply; and turning away in confusion, evidently knew not what answer to make.

"Elizabeth," said Mr. Gunthorpe, starting from his chair and taking her hand, "look me in the face, and tell me that as a woman you have never done aught which has conjured up that blush to your cheeks!"

"On my soul, Mr. Gunthorpe," replied Lady Bess, at once speaking with the dignity of maiden purity and feminine virtue in its most real and best sense,—"*as a woman* I have never done aught for which I need blush!"

Mr. Gunthorpe wrung her hand with effusion: and both she and her brother were surprised to observe the tears trickle down his cheeks,—not only surprised, but affected also; for it was singular that this old man—a complete stranger to them—should take such an evident interest in their circumstances both moral and worldly. But hastily dashing away those tears, Mr. Gunthorpe resumed his seat, and for a few moments remained wrapped up in deep thought.

"Well," he suddenly resumed, turning towards Lady Bess, "about yourself? You had a fortune, I suppose?"

"I received some money," she answered, still with a visible unwillingness to be thus questioned.

"Oh! you received some money?" repeated Mr. Gunthorpe. "Would you mind telling me how much? I can assure you that I ask not from mere curiosity——"

"Then I will tell you sir," responded Lady Bess. "I received five thousand pounds."

"Five thousand pounds! no more?" said Mr. Gunthorpe; "Are you sure? Pray tell me the exact truth, without reserve."

"That is the exact truth," replied Lady Bess with increasing curiosity and surprise at this interrogatory. "But I should add, in fairness to a certain individual, that I have latterly received a hundred pounds quarterly, through an attorney in London."

"And that individual! to whom you allude?" said Mr. Gunthorpe, somewhat eagerly: "pray tell me his name."

"I do not know wherefore I should conceal it," observed the amazonian lady: "for you can have none but a good motive in thus questioning me——"

"Certainly not. On my soul, as a living man," exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe vehemently, "my motive is a good one. The name of that individual."

"Sir John Marston," rejoined Elizabeth.

"Ah! the villain!" muttered the old gentleman, in a tone of deep execration. "But now another question, my dear Elizabeth—for so you must permit me to call you. You have been married—you are married——your husband——I presume as a matter of course his name is Chandos?"

Lady Bess blushed up to the very hair of her head, and uttered not a word.

"My dear sir," said Francis Paton, approaching Mr. Gunthorpe and bending down towards him, "pardon me for hinting that your words touch upon topics not altogether agreeable to my sister."

"Poor boy—poor girl! I would not willingly or wilfully distress either of you," said the old gentleman, in a tremulous voice that showed he was much moved. "Elizabeth, believe what I say—I would not wantonly cause you pain. You have assured me that as a woman you can look without a blush upon your past life—therefore why not speak of your husband? If he be dead, and you deplore his loss, I can sympathize with you: but if he be alive and separated from you, it can scarcely be from any fault of your own, if your life has been pure and chaste? And that it has been so, I feel convinced: for there is something in your look which corroborates your solemn affirmation."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Gunthorpe—most sacaredly can I repeat that assurance!" exclaimed Lady Bess: then as her voice suddenly sank into a lower and graver tone, she said, "My life has had its faults: but that which woman generally commits first, has never tainted my name;"—and she averted her blushing countenance as she spoke.

"My sister has been married, Mr. Gunthorpe," whispered Francis Paton: "but she has never lived with her husband for a single day—no, nor for an hour, nor a minute. She is the same as if the marriage ceremony had never been performed at all."

"This is most remarkable," said the old gentleman, gazing in profoundest surprise upon that handsome creature, of superb shape, who stood with half-averted countenance at a little distance from where he was seated. "But your husband, Elizabeth," he continued, —"pray do not hesitate to speak to me upon this head. What was he? where is he?"

"There is such an earnestness in your words, Mr. Gunthorpe," replied the lady, now bending her magnificent eyes upon him again, "that I cannot help answering your questions. The man whom I married, bore not the name of Chandos;"—then after a few moments' hesitation, she said, "I would tell you what his real name is, but that I should perhaps be doing an injury to a young lady of whom I have heard some good things, and nothing bad."

"Whatever necessity there may be for secrecy and confidence, Elizabeth," observed Mr. Gunthorpe solemnly, "that necessity shall be respected by me. I am a man of honour."

"Oh, you need not give me this assurance!" exclaimed Lady Bess: "your conduct to Henrietta and her mother made me esteem you before I knew you. And now there is something which impels me to give you my confidence and to reply to all your questions. If I chose to assume the title," she added after another brief pause, "I could call myself the Marchioness of Villebelle!"

"Villebelle?" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe. "Ah! I comprehend. He eloped some short time back with the Hon. Constance Farefield, Lady Saxondale's daughter."

"And he has married her," rejoined Lady Bess.

"Married her?" cried Mr. Gunthorpe, in astonishment. "But if he were previously married to you?"

"He was," she observed: "but I released him. I never loved him—I cared not for him. I have never known what love is," she added, in a softer and gentler voice. "But if he loved, I could pity him. And he did love. I meet him a few weeks ago—after a long, long separation. I had never seen him since the day which united our hands at the altar. How could I consider that mock ceremony binding? It was a marriage and no marriage. Well, sir, we met as I have already told you; and it was a few weeks back. He unbosomed all his secrets to me—and I voluntarily offered to place in his hands whatsoever papers existed in mine as the proofs of our marriage".

"And you did so?" said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Yes. But I did not choose to meet him again: I therefore gave him an appointment for a particular night and at a particular place. This was at

King's Cross; and I despatched to him a messenger with the papers of which I have spoken. He has married Lady Saxondale's younger daughter: they have gone to Madrid—and I hope that they will be happy."

"But this is wonderful as a romance!" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "You are a singular being, Elizabeth. I have not been quite an hour yet in your society, and I have discovered many excellent traits in your character,"—and he spoke with a sincerity and an earnestness that showed how deeply interested he really was in the object of his eulogies.

"Accept my gratitude, dear sir," she answered, "for the kind language you address to me."

"Kind, Elizabeth!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe. "But I must subdue these emotions for the present," he murmured to himself: then after a brief interval of reflection, he said, "There are many, many more questions that I should wish to ask you: but I am fearful of appearing too obtrusive at present. Many mysteries are evidently surrounding you both."

"And which, if I mistake not, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lady Bess, accosting the old gentleman and looking earnestly in his countenance, "methinks that you could clear up if you would. Yes—I am convinced of it!"

At this moment the door of the parlour opened, and the invalid appeared upon the threshold.

"Adolphus!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe the instant he caught sight of the young nobleman's countenance.

"What! you know him?" said Lady Bess, with increased surprise. "What is the meaning of all this? Who are you, Mr. Gunthorpe? Pray speak—tell us—keep us not in suspense——"

"I knew Adolphus when he was a boy," said the old gentleman, his voice again becoming tremulous and his looks expressive of deep inward emotion, as he seized the invalid's hand and pressed it warmly.

Adolphus had been naturally surprised at so fervid a greeting from a stranger; but the moment he learnt, by Lady Bess's words, that the old gentleman was Mr. Gunthorpe of whom Henrietta had often spoken, he expressed the most enthusiastic delight at making his acquaintance. Mr. Gunthorpe gazed upon him long and earnestly; and then said in a solemn voice, "Yes: assuredly you are the true and rightful Lord Everton!"

"There cannot be a doubt of it," observed Lady Bess: "we have proofs the most positive. Well did Adolphus recognize the portrait of his mother——"

"The portrait of Lady Everton?" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Have you it here? If so, permit me to see it."

"It is here," said Elizabeth, unlocking a writing desk and producing the picture which she had torn from the book at Lord Petersfield's house.

Mr. Gunthorpe took it from her hand, and hastened to the window, where he contemplated that portrait for some minutes. His back was turned towards Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank, during the time that he was thus occupied: but that his gaze was intent, and that he studied the picture earnestly, was evident from the circumstance that his head moved not during those minutes. As he turned away from the window and gave back the portrait to Lady Bess, she observed that there was the mark of a tear-drop upon it: and she felt more convinced than even at first, that Mr. Gunthorpe was in some way or another intimately yet mysteriously connected with the circumstances relating to the past and which the present was rapidly developing.

"My dear young friend," said the old gentleman, addressing himself to Adolphus, "the principal object of my visit here to-day was to speak to you upon a certain delicate matter. I am indeed glad that I came," he continued, flinging a rapid glance upon Elizabath and Frank; "for I have heard things which I little expected to hear, and which have interested me profoundly. But upon those points we shall touch no more to-day. For the present let me speak to you, Adolphus, relative to your own affairs. Do not regard me as a stranger: I am not one. When you were a boy, I knew you well: but you doubtless recollect me not. I am so much altered!"—and these last words were uttered mournfully.

"My dear sir," whispered Elizabeth Chandos, drawing Mr. Gunthorpe aside, "it pains Adolphus to dwell too long upon the past. If you will, I am perfectly disposed to submit to you all the proofs I have obtained in respect to the atrocious guilt of his uncle, the usurping Lord Everton. Come with me into another room."

Mr. Gunthorpe accordingly followed Lady Bess to the opposite parlour;

and when they were alone together, she narrated to him all that she had learnt from the lips of Adolphus relative to the incidents of his earlier years, and how he was carried off from Everton Park in the middle of the night, just before his father, General Lord Everton, was expected home from India. She likewise explained how on that very same night the corpse of another boy of the same age was substituted for the living heir. Mr. Gunthorpe rose from his seat at this part of the narrative, and paced to and fro in the little apartment in a state of the utmost excitement.

"I knew that Everton," alluding to the uncle, "was a villain," he said: "but still I thought him not capable of such monstrous guilt as this! By heaven, there is no punishment too great for such a miscreant! How is it, Elizabeth, that you have not invoked the aid of justice ere now?"

"Ah! my dear sir," responded Lady Bess, in a tone of deep melancholy, "because there are reasons which induce me to seek the settlement of all this without exposure to the world."

"And those reasons?" asked Mr. Gunthorpe, with a look of anxiety and suspense.

"I fear," replied Elizabeth Chandos, slowly, that this bad man is acquainted with secrets relative to one whose honour and good name must be spared."

"And that one?" cried Mr. Gunthorpe vehemently.

"Lady Everton—the mother of Adolphus!' rejoined Lady Bess. "But not to Adolphus yet have I revealed what I know or rather suspect——"

"But to me, Elizabeth—to me, I say," interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe, with a voice and look of solemn adjuration: "to *me* must you tell everything! I did not think of entering farther into explanations this day: but what you have been saying renders it necessary. Tell me then, my dear Elizabeth—tell me, I beseech you—what your suspicions are, or what your knowledge is?"

"I will, Mr. Gunthorpe," responded the amazonian lady, deeply impressed with the conviction that he had not merely grave reasons but even some mysterious right thus to question her: then in a low and solemn voice, she added, "My belief is, Mr. Gunthorpe that Lady Everton is my own mother, and therefore the mother of Frank also!"

Mr. Gunthorpe said nothing: but he looked strangely at Lady Bess. Indeed, shrewd and penetrating though she was, she could not comprehend the nature of that look: but at least she felt assured that it was fraught with a kind interest for her.

"Yes—that indeed is a grave consideration," he observed after a long pause. "Elizabeth, you are acting most wisely—most prudently; you are acting in a way that does you infinite honour. Yes, my dear Elizabeth—the good name of Lady Everton must be screened—must be protected: and therefore her vile brother-in-law must be dealt cautiously with. You will admit me to your counsels—you will suffer me to advise with you relative to each consecutive step you may take. I see that you are given with the soundest sense and the most mature judgment——"

"Be assured, sir," responded the lady, still under the influence of that unaccountable power which Mr. Gunthorpe had in so brief a space of time acquired over her, "I shall be only too happy to have a gentleman of your wisdom and goodness to succour and counsel me."

"And now one more word," said Mr. Gunthorpe, looking her very hard in the face. "You suspect who your mother is: have you likewise found any clue to the name of your father?"

Lady Bess started at this question; and she gazed upon Mr. Gunthorpe with amazement and intense curiosity. How did he know that she was even ignorant of her father's name? Not a word to that effect had been spoken since he entered the house: not a word to that effect had she ever uttered to Henrietta; not a word to that effect had she ever breathed to a soul who, so far as she could see, might have mentioned it to Mr. Gunthorpe. How then could he know it? Who was he—this Mr. Gunthorpe, that had become so suddenly interested in her affairs, and evidently knew more than she could dream of?

"Ah, I see what is passing in your mind," he said: "but you must not become the questioner now. Perhaps the time will shortly come when I shall have strange things to tell you: but that moment is not now present. Again I ask you, Elizabeth——and I conjure you to respond——have you any idea who is your father?"

"Wait one moment, sir," she said; and immediately left the room.

In less than a minute she returned, bearing a letter which she handed to him, saying, "Read this. It was written to me from Dover, by the Marquis of Villebelle, who met Sir John Marston there."

"Ah! Sir John Marston at Dover?" observed Mr. Gunthorpe, as he opened the letter: then having hastily scanned its contents, he slowly folded it up again—returned it to Elizabeth—and began to pace to and fro in great agitation.

She watched him without saying a word: for there was something in his looks and his manner which made her feel a species of awe, as if there were sanctity in his emotions—a sanctity upon which she dared not obtrude.

"We have said enough for to-day, Elizabeth," he suddenly exclaimed, stopping short and taking her hand. "There is much more I wish to learn from your lips—the entire history of your past life—the history also of your brother Frank: but it must be postponed. You must think over all that has taken place within the two hours past: you must study to know me better. Then you will have the fullest confidence in me—and you will speak without reserve. I know—I feel that it is too much to expect you to open your heart entirely to me who am a comparative stranger unto you. In a day or two you shall see me again: but take no step in the meantime without making me aware of it. And now one word more ere we leave this room to return into the other. You have no funds—I think you told me—beyond a quarterly allowance of a hundred pounds: and your brother has nothing. You have Adolphus to maintain——In short, doubtless you are not too well off. Give me pen, ink, and paper."

Mr. Gunthorpe spoke these last words with the tone of a man who was accustomed to command, and to be obeyed likewise the instant he commanded. Elizabeth Chandos, still under that mystic and unaccountable influence which gave him an empire over her, placed writing materials before him; and seating himself at the table, he wrote something on a slip of paper.

"There," he said, flinging down the pen and starting up from the chair, "you will accept that as a proof of the cordial friendship I have offered you. Now let us go into the other room:"—and without suffering her to wait and see what he had written upon the paper, he led her forth from the parlour.

They entered the opposite one, where they had left Adolphus and Frank; and Mr. Gunthrope, at once accosting the former, said, "I now know all that regards you—and you are beyond doubt the rightful Lord Everton. I said so just now. I remember your features. In me shall you find a friend."

Adolphus pressed the old gentleman's hand with grateful fervour, the tears trickling down his cheeks.

"And now," said Mr. Gunthorpe, with an arch smile," have you no message to send to Henrietta? Ah! that name fills your countenance with animation. Well, my dear Adolphus, the girl is worthy of you—and she has already learnt to love you. God grant that you may be happy! If I do not come again to see you to-morrow, I shall send some kind message by Henrietta, to furnish her with an excuse for calling at the cottage."

With these words, the old gentleman took an affectionate farewell of Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank; and hurrying forth, gave some brief instructions to his coachman. Then, waving his hand to those who stood upon the threshold, he entered the carriage, which immediately drove away.

The three proceeded to the parlour where he had left the slip of paper lying upon the table. It was a cheque upon Mr. Gunthorpe's banker for five thousand pounds. Then more than ever did Elizabeth, Frank, and Adolphus wonder who Mr. Gunthorpe could be.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

APPREHENSIONS.

LORD PETERSFIELD was seated in his library at about three o'clock in the afternoon, looking over a number of papers connected with his diplomatic avocations of past years, and wondering whether certain overtures which he had recently been making to the Ministers then in power, would result according to his wishes. His desire was to obtain an important embassy, which, according to rumour, would soon be vacant; and he was furnishing up his rusty ideas by the aid of the papers that he was so deeply conning. In the middle of his occupation a footman entered: and presenting him with a card, said, "This gentleman requests an immediate interview with your lordship."

"Sir John Marston?" said Lord Petersfield, who seldom suffered himself to be surprised out of his diplomatic gravity. "Well, let him walk up;"—and yet he was far from liking this visit.

In a few minutes the Baronet made his appearance. He advanced with outstretched hand: but the nobleman received him somewhat coldly, and eyed him with a certain degree of suspicion.

"Many years have elapsed since you and I met, my lord," said the Baronet, gazing upon him as if to mark the extent to which the ravages of time had gone in respect to the nobleman's person.

"It may be many years Sir John Marston," said Lord Petersfield, with his habitual diplomatic caution: "but I am not prepared to say how many—indeed I should not like to venture a conjecture without careful consideration——"

"Your lordship appears to receive me somewhat coldly," said the Baronet.

"No—not coldly," rejoined Petersfield; "but I am not as yet assured—that is to say, I have not yet had leisure to make up my mind whether you *are* Sir John Marston or not; and I should not like to come to a hasty conclusion."

"What nonsense is this, Petersfield?" exclaimed Marston with a movement of impatience: then as he threw himself upon a seat, he said, "Come, throw off this diplomatic cautiousness and reserve of your's: for we have to speak upon important business, I can tell you."

"Well, then," said the diplomatist, "granting that you *are* Sir John Marston—and considering from the corroborative evidence of your printed card, coupled with your own deliberate averment, that you may be so——"

"Why, you know I am," ejaculated Marston, stamping his foot with another paroxysm of impatience "What the devil makes you go on in this rigmarole style? Surely a matter of some sixteen years or so has not so changed me that you do not recognize me?"

"Personal appearance is not always a trustworthy credential," remarked Lord Petersfield. "But still, as I was saying ——"

"The deuce take what you were saying!" interrupted the Baronet. "I will very soon give you a proof that I am that self-same Sir John Marston—Lady Everton's brother—with whom you and the present Lord Everton did a certain business."

"Enough!" said his lordship, now looking anxiously around; then rising from his seat, he advanced to the door—opened it—looked cautiously out—and satisfying himself that there were no eavesdroppers, closed it again. "Now, Sir John Marston, what business has procured me the honour—I might perhaps say the pleasure of this visit?"

"That very same business to which I have already alluded," responded the Baronet. "Do you know my lord that a certain young lady has discovered a clue ——"

"Eh—what?" ejaculated his lordship, now speaking rapidly enough; and his diplomatic countenance, suddenly losing all its gravity, became expressive of the utmost agitation. "Do you mean Elizabeth Paton—or the Marchioness of Villebelle—or whatever she may call herself?"

"I do," replied Sir John; "and if I be not very much mistaken, she at the present moment bears the name of **Mrs. Chandos.**"

"You are right, Sir John—you are right. Lady Saxondale and Marlow both told me the other day that Frank Paton, whom I placed with her ladyship, had found a sister in that woman. But do you know——"

"I know that she is a female highwayman," interrupted the Baronet. "It is a most extraordinary thing that I should be staying at Dover when her adventure at the *Admiral's Head* took place. I heard something of it at the time, but little thought that Mrs. Chandos—the heroine of that adventure—and our Elizabeth Paton were one and the same person. I do not read the local newspaper habitually; and therefore the account, which gave a full description of her personal appearance, escaped my notice. But yesterday I accidentally lighted upon the particular number of the Dover newspaper containing that report; and as I read on, I was struck with the conviction that Elizabeth Paton *is*, Mrs. Chandos."

"And you are right," responded Petersfield. "I have been told that she is Frank's sister. But what of it? and what connexion have her misdoings with any clue——"

"Who said that there was a connexion?" interrupted the Baronet. "I tell you that she does possess a clue You know that Villebelle has married Constance Farefield"

"Yes—I am aware of it," answered Lord Petersfield. "Indeed, to tell you the truth, I delicately dropped to Lady Saxondale a hint, many months ago, that the Marquis had a wife living. Of course I did not say how I knew it: I pretended to have heard some such thing rumoured when I was in Paris——"

"Well, but you see the marriage has taken place," continued Sir John Marston. "Elizabeth released Villebelle from all engagement towards her—from all bonds or ties——that is to say, so far as she was able. I should have stopped the marriage most effectually, had not Villebelle, when at Dover, whispered in my ear a certain name, which convinced me with startling effect that Elizabeth does possess a clue to past events that may prove dangerous enough for us."

"And that clue?" asked Lord Petersfield, all his diplomatic reserve having given place to intense anxiety."

"The name of Lady Everton was breathed in my ears," rejoined the Baronet.

"Ah! this is awkward." said Petersfield. "But what did you do? what have you done?"

"What could I do? I did not then know where Elizabeth was: nor did I know that she and Mrs. Chandos were one and the same. I thought of doing a thousand things—of hunting her out—of locking her up in a mad house, if I found her—or even of making away with her if necessary."

"Sir John Marston!" exclaimed Petersfield, becoming white as a sheet.

"Ah! you may affect horror, my lord," resumed the Baronet: "but I was prepared for anything desperate. Yet where was I to search for her? All I knew was that she had recently been to Robson—that's my attorney, you know—to receive some money I allow her. So I wrote to Robson to ask if he knew where she lived. His reply was that he did not even know whether she was in London. So I remained fretting, and fidgeting, and chafing at Dover, not knowing what on earth to do. At last, as I tell you, the Dover paper of some weeks back, containing the account of that business, fell into my hands; then I saw at once that Elizabeth was the female highwayman who stopped Marlow and Malton, and that she lived somewhere near Edmonton. So I came up to London to-day—and have only just arrived. My first visit is paid to you, that we may consult together."

"Do you happen to have the Dover paper about you?" asked Petersfield: "for I know no more of Marlow's adventure than what he told me at the time."

"Yes—here it is," returned Sir John Marston, producing the journal.

Lord Petersfield took it and commenced reading at the column indicated by the Baronet: but as he continued the perusal, his features began to express a growing amazement; and suddenly rapping his clenched hand upon the table, he ejaculated, "Then, by heaven, it was she!"

"What do you mean?" asked the Baronet hastily.

"I mean that Elizabeth has been here—that she had paid a visit to this house," responded Lord Petersfield in consternation. "I never could fancy what the meaning of that strange creature's intrusion could be. I set her down as mad. Marlow never happened to describe her person to me——"

"But did you not recollect her?" inquired Sir John.

"I never saw her since her earliest childhood," answered the nobleman. "When I took Frank to school at Southampton, I carefully avoided seeing Elizabeth. She was then sixteen: and therefore if she had seen me, she would have remembered me again—which I was naturally anxious to avoid. Ah! this is indeed most threatening. What could she have come hither for? I can't make it out. It was assuredly she. The description in this newspaper is life-like—handsome but largely chiselled features—full lips, somewhat coarse and richly red—teeth white as ivory—olive complexion—a somewhat bold and hardy gaze——a voice strong, but not harsh, and with flute like tones—Yes, to be sure, it is the same! it is beyond all doubt!"

"But upon what pretence did she

come ?" demanded the Baronet. "Consider—reflect! You must tax your memory: it is important we should know. It may enable us to form an idea of the extent of the clue which she possesses."

"Ah! a suspicion strikes me" ejaculated Petersfield "On that very same day I recollect full well now, her brother Frank was here; and he happened to see that portrait of Lady Everton which was published in the *Court Beauties*. Stop a moment."

With these words Lord Petersfield hurried from the room: but in less than a minute he returned holding a book open in his hand;—and advancing up to the Baronet, he showed him where a leaf had been abstracted, exclaiming, "Yes—it is gone!"

"Then rest assured, my lord," replied Sir John Marston, "that they are thoroughly upon the right track; and having discovered who their mother is, they will discover all the rest. There will be a terrific exposure And now, what is to be done?"

"What is to be done indeed?" said Lord Petersfield, pacing the room in considerable agitation, all his natural feelings triumphing over cold artificiality

"Yes—what is to be done?" repeated the Baronet. "You are rich, my lord—you have feathered your nest well in various diplomatic services—and you can perhaps afford to disgorge. But with me it is very different! I have no more than I know what to do with; and if I were to give up my share I should be a ruined man. Indeed, it was only to keep the woman quiet and enable her to have enough to live upon, that I have allowed her this four hundred a-year for a little time past. I was fearful that if she fell into poverty, she might begin talking to people of the transaction of that marriage—and thus one thing might have led on to another, resulting in the fullest exposure. But I repeat that if I am called upon to refund, I may as well go and drown myself afterwards."

"Besides, the exposure! the disgrace! the damning infamy!" ejaculated Lord Petersfield. "Would to God I had never done it!"

"Ah! you were something like myself in those times, my lord," said Marston bitterly: "too fond of the gaming-table!"

"And Lady Petersfield!" continued the nobleman, not heeding the Baronet's acerbic interjection; "what a blow for her! she who suspects it not! she who has not an idea of all this! And with her diabolical temper too—Why it will be enough to make me blow my brains out!"

"A pretty couple we shall be, then!" said Marston, with that bitter mocking laugh in which despair sometimes breaks forth: "I to drown myself—you to blow your brains out! But what is to be done? It is no use your walking up and down the room like this. Pray resume some of your diplomatic cunning as soon as ever you like. The sooner, too, the better. Fortunately we know where Elizabeth is—at a cottage near Edmonton. The report in the Dover newspaper lets us know that much. Now then, decide. Shall we lock her up in a madhouse? or shall we do that other thing—you know what I mean?'

"Do not allude to it, Sir John Marston!" replied Lord Petersfield impatiently. "I am not so bad as that."

"But I am bad enough for anything," exclaimed Marston, "under such circumstances. I tell you what, Petersfield—an idea has struck me! Let you and I go and lay in wait in the neighbourhood of her residence; and when she comes out, we will shoot her dead. If you are afraid to fire the pistol, I am not. Then we will swear she tried to rob us: and the respectability of your name your high position—your rank—all will give a colouring to the statement. We may afterwards devise more means to dispose of the boy Frank"

"Sir John Marston, are you mad?' ejaculated the nobleman, becoming white as a sheet.

The Baronet was about to reply, when the door opened, and a footman entered, bearing a card, and intimating that the gentleman whose name it described sought an immediate interview.

"Mr. Gunthorpe?" said Lord Petersfield, instantaneously recovering his self-possession on the entrance of the servant and therewith his habitual reserve and caution. "I do not think—but of course I should not like to say positively,—that I am not acquainted with any one bearing the name of Gunthorpe——However he had better come up: Sir John Marston, you can retire into my private cabinet for a few minutes."

The baronet accordingly proceeded into a small adjoining room which

Lord Petersfield indicated; and almost immediately afterwards Mr. Gunthorpe made his appearance. Lord Petersfield bowed coldly and stiffly: for he thought that his visitor was some citizen dwelling on the eastern side of Temple Bar—and his lordship had a most haughty contempt and supreme disgust for every body of that description.

Mr. Gunthorpe stared very hard at the nobleman—and then satd, "I presume that I am addressing Lord Petersfield?"

"Really, Mr. Gunthorpe, I am not prepared—that is to say, I do not think I ought to answer a question so pointedly put. I may be Lord Petersfield—and indeed, after due deliberation, I think, I may venture to say that I am—with every proviso requisite under such circumstances."

Mr. Gunthorpe first looked surprised—then indignant—and then disgusted at the nobleman's answer; and deliberately taking a seat, he said, "You had better sit down, my lord: for I desire to have a very serious conversation with you."

"And pray, Mr. Gunthorpe, who may you be?" asked the nobleman, as he gravely and slowly deposited himself in his arm-chair. "Don't be in a hurry to answer—take time to reflect——"

"It needs no time for an honest man to proclaim himself such," was Mr. Gunthorpe's response; and he looked with a strange significancy at Lord Petersfield.

"Your answer is ambiguous," said the nobleman: "it admits of a double meaning. It may be intended to imply a consciousness of your own honesty: or it may be an indirect and not ungraceful tribute to mine."

"Humph!" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "I can assure your lordship I was very far from intending the latter construction to be put upon my words at all. However, this is no occasion for childish trifling. Lord Petersfield, is there nothing upon your conscience with which you can reproach yourself?"

This was indeed a home-thrust question put to the diplomatist; and coming so quickly upon the disagreeable business he had been discussing with Sir John Marston, there can be no wonder that Lord Petersfield should suddenly turn pale and look confused.

"But little more than sixteen years have elapsed," continued Mr. Gunthorpe, again looking very hard in Lord Petersfield's face, "since a certain nobleman who believed that in you he possessed a sincere and faithful friend——".

"Ah!" gasped Petersfield, sinking back in his chair: but in a sudden paroxysm of excitement, he exclaimed, "Who are you, Mr. Gunthorpe?"

"The intimate friend of that nobleman," was the reply solemnly and firmly given; "and one who will see that the wrong be righted. All the circumstances of the past are known to me——"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," interrupted Petersfield, in an imploring tone, "I beseech you to deal mercifully—I will make every reparation. Where is that nobleman? You did well not to mention his name; for the very walls have ears".

"Yes—and doors too," said Mr. Gunthorpe, whose keen eye had caught sight of one gently opening an inch or two opposite to that by which he had entered: and as he spoke, he rose from his seat—walked straight up to that door—and pulling it completely open, beheld the Baronet retreating from it, having evidently been listening.

A half-suppressed ejaculation escaped Mr. Gunthorpe's lips: for he instantaneously recognised Sir John Marston, on whose person the ravages of time had not been sufficient to prevent such recognition. But not choosing for some reason of his own, to show that he had thus recognized him, Mr. Gunthorpe turned round to Lord Petersfield, demanding sternly. "Who is your lordship's eavesdropper?"

"I am Sir John Marston," the Baronet at once said; for Lord Petersfield, again sinking back aghast in his seat, could not utter a word. "You are Mr. Gunthorpe, as I understand and I have heard you touch upon a certain delicate matter. Perhaps, therefore, I may be admitted to the conference?"

"Most assuredly," rejoined the old gentleman, with accents of significant bitterness, "for if you are Sir John Marston, you are as much interested in it as Lord Petersfield himself."

"Granted!" exclaimed the Baronet: and he spoke with a degree of insolent hardihood which made Lord Petersfield think that he had devised some means of averting the threatened exposure.

"Well then, Sir John Marston," resumed Mr. Gunthorpe, "inasmuch as you have been listening at that door, I need not repeat the words I have already spoken to Lord Petersfield. But as the friend and confident of *a certain nobleman*," he continued, accentuating his words, " I demand an account of the stewardship of you, Lord Petersfield—of you also, Sir John Marston—in respect to the sum of one hundred thousand pounds deposited in your joint hands sixteen years ago, for the benefit of Elizabeth and Francis Paton."

" And are we to understand," said Marston, " that there is a very delicate anxiety and tender interest entertained in a certain quarter with regard to these said persons Elizabeth and Francis ?"

" Most assuredly !" responded Mr, Gunthorpe, with a stern look. " How dare you assume, by your very tone and manner, that it can be otherwise ?"

" I assume nothing of the sort," replied the Baronet. " I will ask one question. Have you, Mr. Gunthorpe, as the friend and confident of a certain nobleman, seen these persons, Elizabeth and Francis ?"

" I have—I have seen them both : it is barely an hour since I left them. That they have been wronged—cruelly, scandalously wronged—is but too evident : but they themselves are unconscious of the extent——"

" And pray, Mr. Gunthorpe," inquired Marston, with a stardonic smile upon his countenance, " did Elizabeth make known to you the pleasant pursuits in which she has recently been engaged ?"

" What mean you, sir ?" cried Mr. Gunthorpe, angrily. " I have every reason to believe——

" Believe nothing without being convinced," interrupted Marston. " Here : take and read this document !"

As he thus spoke, the Baronet spread open the Dover newspaper before Mr. Gunthorpe ; and the old gentleman began to read the column pointed out to him. Gradually did a strange excitement come over him : he grew pale as death—subdued ejaculations escaped his lips—his agitation was extreme Sir John Marston threw a significant look at Lord Petersfield—a look in which a sardonic triumph was blended with a conviction of their own safety.

Mr. Gunthorpe finished reading the report—drew his hand across his brow, as if with a pang of ineffable mental agony—and then looked at the paper again. He longed to start up in a fury and denounce the whole affair as a fraud or a delusion : he longed to proclaim his conviction that the Mrs. Chandos of Dover was not the Elizabeth in whom he was interested, and a different being from Mrs. Chandos the highwaywoman. But when he reflected that from Henrietta's lips he had heard how Elizabeth had appeared in male attire when she rescued that young girl from Beech-Tree Lodge, he was staggered—he was confounded. And the description, too, which Marlow had given before the Dover magistrate of the female highwayman, tallied so completely with the portrait which the newspaper report drew of the Mrs. Chados who appeared as a prisoner on the occasion, that it was impossible to doubt ! Even the extraordinary nature of the evidence given at that investigation before the Mayor of Dover, though to all appearance establishing an *alibi*, could not possibly prove satisfactory to a man of Mr. Gunthorpe's shrewdness and intelligence. Alas, yes ! he could come to no other conclusion than the one fatal to the character of Elizabeth Paton. And this idea was sadly and terribly confirmed, when he recalled to mind her own words, uttered to him ere now—that although as a woman she was pure and chaste, yet that her life had not been free from faults. The poor old gentleman, was overwhelmed—almost annihilated ; and after remaining in utter consternation and dismay for a few minutes, he gave vent to his grief in tears.

"That will be a shocking account," observed Sir John Marston, with an ill-subdued malignity, " for you to forward to that nobleman whose friend and confidant you are."

" Villain ! " ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe, suddenly dashing away the tears from his eyes and turning his indignant looks upon the Baronet : " all this must be your work—and your's also, my lord ! Had you both performed your duty towards that young woman, she never could have been forced into such ways as these. But there shall be vengeance and punishment for your iniquities !"

Thus speaking, Mr. Gunthorpe sprang up from his seat, and was hurriedly quitting the room—when Sir John Marston called out, " Stop ! you had better do nothing rash ! Remember, the honour of Lady Everton may be at stake !"

Mr. Gunthorpe was struck by the

circumstance thus announced, and which for the moment he had forgotten. He *did* therefore stop short; and returning to the chair he had so abruptly left, sat down and reflected for upwards of a minute.

"I find," he said at length, "that I have to deal with villains of no ordinary stamp. Yes—you are right, Sir John Marston: there can be no exposure—no vengeance. But rest assured that punishment of another kind will overtake both yourself and your accomplice, Lord Petersfield. Your conscience, Sir John Marston—and your's likewise, my lord, will not suffer you to remain for ever indifferent to this signal iniquity which you have perpetrated. I leave you therefore to the enjoyment of your ill-gotten gains—to the pangs of remorse which sooner or later will inevitably overtake you! I leave you to all the consequences of a guilt which heaven cannot suffer to go unpunished."

Having thus spoken in accents of a withering bitterness, Mr. Gunthorpe rose from his seat and quitted the room.

"There! you see how splendidly I have managed it!" exclaimed Sir John Marston, the moment the door closed behind the old gentleman. "We are safe—we are safe. I feel more at ease than I have done for a long, long time past."

Lord Petersfield, now beginning to breathe freely, remarked, "Yes—the affair has indeed taken a turn which I had little anticipated."

"The idea struck me all in a moment," observed Sir John, "as I listened at the door. I can't tell how it was—but it occurred to me, somehow or another, that the visit of this Mr. Gunthorpe was connected with the business we had been talking on. I suppose it was because that business was uppermost in my thoughts at the time. However, such was my impression: and it induced me to listen. Thus you see, Petersfield, that while you, with all your diplomatic astuteness, would have suffered yourself to be crushed down to the dust by that old bully, I got rid of him by riding the high horse and taking the matter with an air of hardihood and effrontery."

"It is indeed fortunate," observed Petersfield, "that we have got rid of this unpleasant affair so easily. But think you we shall bear no more of it?"

"I am confident we shall not," replied Marston. "I will stake my existence upon it. This Gunthorpe is evidently deep in a certain nobleman's secrets. Did you see how he was affected? That was at the idea of having to shock his friend—*this certain nobleman*," added Marston malignantly—"with an account of Elizabeth's ways of life. And then too, there is the necessity of saving Lady Everton's name from exposure and disgrace—which is another safeguard for us. Had the matter rested alone with Elizabeth and Frank, we might not have got out of it so comfortably. But as it is, we are safe, and need trouble ourselves no more upon the matter. I shall even go to Robson and tell him that for the future he need not pay the quarterly allowance to Elizabeth. It will be four hundred a year in my pocket: and thus altogether my visit to London has terminated most fortunately instead of inauspiciously."

"But who is this Mr. Gunthorpe, think you?" asked Lord Petersfield.

"No matter who he is," rejoined Marston: "he has ceased to become an object of terror for us."

" With these words the Baronet took his leave of the nobleman, and quitted the house in high glee and joyous triumph at the result of the whole adventure.

CHAPTER LXXVIII

THE NOBLEMAN AND THE LAWYER.

ABOUT half-an-hour after Sir John Marston had taken his departure from Lord Petersfield's presence, Mr. Malton was announced. This gentleman, as our readers will recollect, was the junior and more grave and steady partner of the eminent legal firm; and though perhaps he possessed not the same sharp-witted qualities as Mr. Marlow, yet he had none of that gentleman's excitability, which often merged into rashness.

"Well, Malton," said Petersfield, who, being very intimate with the lawyers, treated them with a corresponding familiarity, "what has brought you hither this afternoon?" Some new freak of Saxondale's?"

"No, my lord: my business on the present occasions," responded Malton, "regards her ladyship: and as you are so old standing a friend of the family, Mr. Marlow and I have deemed it to be our duty to consult you in the present case."

"And pray what is it!" asked his lordship, looking awfully grave and important at what he took to be a compliment paid to his wisdom and judgment.

"It is an unpleasant business," said Mr. Malton. "Perchance your lordship may have heard of a certain William Deveril?"

"Without committing myself in too positive a manner," replied the nobleman, "I think I may venture to state that I have heard of such a person. Nay, more—I will go so far as to admit that I have seen him at Lady Saxondale's house; and I believe—but I would not pledge myself beyond the possibility of retraction—that he taught the young ladies some particular style of painting."

"Precisely so, my lord. Does it also happen that you have heard a certain tale respecting his behaviour to her ladyship?" inquired the attorney.

"This is a very pointed question, Malton," answered Lord Petersfield: "and though not in the habit of replying without due deliberation, I think that in the present case I may admit that I have heard something of the kind."

"It is relative to this I wish to consult your lordship... Mr. Deveril, it appears, denies the truth of the story altogether; and a gentleman, who has taken up the matter very warmly on his behalf, is about to instruct his attorney to bring an action for defamation against Lady Saxondale."

"You hed better, Malton, tell me the name of that gentleman. But do not speak too hastily—reflect on what you are going to say——you might mention a wrong name. I once knew a person, answering too quickly, give the name of Noakes instead of Brogson. So pray be careful."

"There is no need of reflection, my lord," responded the attorney, with a smile. "The gentleman's name is Gunthorpe."

"Ah, Gunthorpe!" ejaculated the nobleman, with a start; for his name had now become an ominous and inauspicious one for him.

"Yes, my lord. Do you know him?"

"Know him, Malton? I should not like to speak so positively as to avow that I know him: but he was certainly here upon a little private business an hour back."

"Mr. Gunthorpe here?" exclaimed Mr. Malton. "And did he not mention this circumstances to your lordship? for of course he must know that your lordship is a friend of the Saxondale family."

"He did not mention the circumstances, Malton. I think that I may go so far as to assure you that he did not—I am certain that I may."

"Well then, I must explain how the matter stands. Sometime back—as much as a fortnight ago—Mr. Gunthorpe came to your office, and explained his business, as I have already intimated to your lordship. He agreed to suspend all proceeding for one week, on condition that we would write to her ladyship upon the subject. It however appears that business has prevented Mr. Gunthorpe from returning to us until yesterday; and then he came to inquire what we proposed to do on behalf of her ladyship in the matter. Now we have received two or three letters from her ladyship with reference thereto; and the last one, which came to hand yesterday morning, bade us defend any action that might be brought against her ladyship—as she adhered to her original statement, and defied Mr. Deveril to asperse her good name.

"Well then, Malton," said Lord Petersfield, "I suppose you must defend the action."

"But consider, my lord, the inconvenience of dragging her ladyship's name before the tribunals on such a subject. Your lordship is well aware of the wickedness of the world; and there will be found plenty of persons ready enough to take Deveril's part."

"But what is your opinion, Malton?" inquired the nobleman: "and what does Deveril allege?"

The lawyer proceeded to explain in detail the particulars of that interview which had taken place with Mr. Gunthorpe in Parliament Street, and which was duly chronicled in our narrative.

"More than ever," continued Malton, "did Mr. Gunthorpe insist yesterday upon what he had previously stated. He warns us, if we value Lady Saxondals's reputation, not to let her go to trial. He says that he possesses evidence the nature of which we little suspect, and which will prove damnatory to her ladyship. He declares that he has no particular desire to bring this matter before the public—but that his only object is to clear up his young friend Deveril's reputation, I must confess that he spoke so fairly, and at the same time in a tone of such solemn warning, that both Marlow and myself entertain serious apprehensions concerning the matter."

"Do you mean me to understand," asked Lord Petersfield, "that you think it quite possible Mr. Deveril's version may be the right one, and Lady Saxondale's the erroneous one? Don't speak hastly—take time to consider——"

"I have considered the matter—and very seriously," responded Malton. "At first both myself and Marlow felt indignant at the slur thus thrown upon her ladyship's reputation: we thought of the purity of her life—the untarnished character she has maintained—the dignified virtue which has appeared to place her beyond the reach even of suspicion. But Mr. Gunthorpe so pointedly and emphatically assured us that he possessed the means, not merely of proving Deveril's case, but likewise of ruining her ladyship's fair fame beyond the possibility of redemption, that Marlow and I scarcely know what to think. In short, we resolved to consult your lordship in this most delicate and unpleasant matter. Heaven forbid that I," Mr. Malton went on to say, "should lend myself to unworthy or unjust suspicious: but we do know, Lord Petersfield, that women sometimes take strange whims and caprices into their head; and if it should have happened that Lady Saxondale, in a moment of weakness, spoke or looked tenderly to this young man, who, as your lordship well knows, is of extraordinary beauty—In a word, my lord, we are all frail beings in this world."

Lord Petersfield, when looking inward to the depths of his own conscience, knew full well that Mr. Malton had just given utterance to a solemn truth; and the circumstances of his own position naturally led him to reflect that it was quite possible, and even probable, that Lady Saxondale *had* laid herself open to grave aspersions. There was he—Lord Petersfield—a man who had filled high diplomatic offices—whose honour and integrity frequently became the subject of compliment on the part of his brother peers in the Upper House—who was occasionally alluded to in certain newspapers as a man of unimpeachable rectitude—and who, in money-affairs, was looked upon by all who knew him as an individual of scrupulous nicety,—there he was occupying this proud position, and yet harbouring the secret consciousness that he was a vile plunderer of orphans—a base betrayer of the confidence which a generous friendship had reposed in him—the accomplice of men of infamous character in the doing of infamous deeds! Such he knew himself to be, while the world at large thought him so very different. Might not the case be somewhat similar with Lady Saxondale? Might not all the pride of her virtue be a mere outward assumption—a mask—an hyprocrisy—a deceit? Besides, did not Lord Petersfield himself know enough of the world—particularly of that aristocratic sphere in which he moved—to be well aware that female frailties were often hidden beneath a consummate dissimulation? And was there not within his own knowledge the special case of Lady Everton—that case in all the ramifying results of which he had been so mixed up?

These varied reflections swept rapidly through the mind of Lord Petersfield, as Mr. Malton had been speaking; and for upwards of a minute he remained silent.

"Well, my dear sir," he at length said, "there may be something worthy of consideration in your remarks. But do you not see that it is a very difficult matter to deal with? Assuredly, Lady Saxondale must not be permitted to rush headlong into disgrace. She may not know the nature of the evidence that her opponents are possessed of against her. Persons—as you of course are even better aware than myself—frequently go to law with the confident hope that everything which is really damnatory to themselves is unknown to their opponents."

"Just so, my lord," said Mr. Malton: "and then, when it all comes out, and they find themselves overwhelmed with disgrace and confusion, they bitterly regret their folly in having presevered with law. I was thinking that if your lordship would only write a pressing letter to Lady Saxondale—or what would be much better, proceed into Lincolnshire and obtain a personal interview—you might, with that delicacy and tact which your lordship knows so well how to use, induce her ladyship to empower Marlow and myself to compromise this matter."

"I cannot possibly give an immediate answer," said the nobleman. "It requires deliberation; it is something to be pondered upon: I could not undertake anything rash——"

"But the affair is urgent, my lord," said Mr. Malton. "In two or three days, unless we are prepared to do something, Mr. Gunthorpe's attorney will commence proceedings."

"Well, my dear sir, I must take the rest of this day to consider the matter," rejoined Lord Petersfield; "and I will let you know to-morrow. If I decide upon proceeding into Lincolnshire——"

"You will in that case," added Malton, wishing to nail the nobleman to this particular course, "start to-morrow morning?"

"Start, Mr. Malton?" observed the diplomatist, looking very grave and very suspicious. "I never *start*. I never do anything in a hurry. I do not *start*, as you term it: I *take my departure*."

"I beg your lordship's pardon for having used so improper a term," said the lawyer: "I will be more guarded in future."

At this moment the footman entered, bearing a large official-looking packet with an enormous seal. Lord Petersfield took it from the silver salver on which it was presented—placed it solemnly before him—and waited until the servant had withdrawn before he broke the seal. Then he opened the despatch—looked slowly round the room to convince himself that there was nobody but Malton present with him—and lastly fixed his eyes upon the lawyer himself as if to acquire the additional certainty that this gentleman was not prepared to take any undue advantage of the packet being opened in his presence. Malton perfectly understood what was passing in the mind of the cautious diplomatist; and he could not help smiling as he rose to take his leave. But the nobleman bade him remain for a few minutes until he had examined the despatch: Mr. Malton accordingly resumed his seat, while Lord Petersfield slowly and solemnly perused the contents of the document he had just received. Having done this, he folded it up again—placed it in the envelope—tied a piece of red tape round the packet—and then deliberately endorsed it with a day of the month and the very hour at which he had received it.

"It is as I thought," said his lordship, "when I begged you to remain. I have just received an announcement——and when I tell you this, Malton, it is with the deliberate conviction that I am justified in so telling you——that I cannot possibly proceed into Lincolnshire. All I can do, is to write to Lady Saxondale. Her Majesty's Ministers, having every confidence in my ability, caution, and wariness, have selected me for a special mission to the Imperial Court of Vienna. It is not altogether unexpected —I think I may go so far as to state that I did positively expect it——"

Again the door opened; and the footman said, "Please your lordship, Lord Saxondale requests a few minutes' interview with your lordship."

"Let Lord Saxondale be introduced," said the nobleman.

"Well, you see," exclaimed Edmund, as he entered the room, "I can't stand this sort of thing any longer; and so I have resolved to go abroad."

Lord Petersfield looked positively aghast at what he considered to be the precipitate and reckless manner in which the young nobleman spoke; while his dignity was offended by the omission of those ceremonial phrases and compliments with which he expected that every visit should invariably commence. Mr. Malton was also surprised at the abrupt and ejaculatory language that Edmund made use of.

"Sit down," said Lord Petersfield, pompously indicating a chair; "and when you have recovered breath and are perfectly master of your thoughts, have the goodness to explain what sort of thing it is you cannot stand."

"Why, I am sick of London-life," exclaimed Saxondale, flinging himself upon one chair and putting his legs upon another. "I wish I had accepted your lordship's proposal of a few weeks back, about being attached to that foreign embassy, you know. Of course you are well aware from that list of debts I sent in, that poor Emily Archer and I were on very intimate terms together; and also as a matter of course, you have read the account in the newspapers of her mysterious death."

"I have no doubt," said Lord Petersfield, gravely, "that she was about to pay a visit to Saxondale Castle at the time—perhaps thinking you were there—or perhaps to see her ladyship for some purpose——"

"Well, I can't say," interrupted Edmund; "and I don't like talking of the business: it has upset me very much. Besides, I am so precious dull all by myself in Park Lane——"

"Then wherefore," inquired Mr. Malton, "do you not join the family circle down in Lincolnshire? I understand that Lady Macdonald and Lady Florina Staunton are there——"

"No: they came back to town yesterday," observed Edmund. "I learnt it by accident. My valet happened to see them arrive."

"And pray, Lord Saxondale," asked Petersfield, severely, "have you not been this day to pay your respect to that lady who is affianced to you?"

"Can't say that I have," responded Edmund. "But I shall go there presently. The fact is, I am very much afraid Florina must have learnt on what terms I was with poor Emily; and if so, all will be up in that quarter. I wish to go abroad for a few months; and therefore I came to tell your lordship that I will accept of that post——"

"It is no longer vacant," remarked Petersfield: "but if you are serious, Edmund, you can accompany *me*. For her Majesty's Ministers have entrusted me with a special mission to Vienna——"

"And when do you propose to leave?" asked Saxondale, making a slight grimace at the thought of accompanying his guardian.

"In three days," returned Lord Petersfield." But if you really purpose to go with me, you must make up your mind to-morrow."

"It's made up at once. I will go!" exclaimed Edmund; "and there's my hand upon it."

Lord Petersfield just took the tips of Edmund's fingers in a cold grasp, and began to give him some advice—which the young nobleman did not think it worth while to wait for; and bidding both his lordship and Mr. Malton good bye, he quitted the room.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE DISCARDED SUITOR.

We must now return to Mr. Gunthorpe, whom we left at the moment when he departed from the presence of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston. Returning to his carriage, which was waiting, the old gentleman ordered himself to be driven to Lady Macdonald's house in Cavendish Square; but as the vehicle proceeded thither, he felt almost inclined to issue a fresh instruction and postpone his visit to Lady Macdonald until the following day. He felt anxious—deeply anxious—to return to Lady Bess's cottage: but on mature reflection he resolved to let the interval of a night pass, so that he should have ample leisure to compose the feelings which had been so cruelly tortured, and thus prepare himself for an interview which he foresaw would be attended with painful circumstances. He therefore allowed the carriage to proceed towards Cavendish Square; and by the time it had reached Lady Macdonald's residence, Mr. Gunthorpe had so far regained his wonted composure that whatever he felt inwardly, was no longer reflected in his countenance.

That his visit at Lady Macdonald's had been expected, was evident from the circumstance that the moment he announced his name he was conducted into a parlour, where her ladyship immediately joined him. Florina was not present at this interview, which lasted for upwards of an hour. Mr. Gunthorpe and Lady Macdonald had much to talk upon: but we cannot at present explain the nature of their discourse. Suffice it to say that at the expiration of the colloquy, Mr. Gunthorpe accompanied Lady Macdonald up into the drawing-room where Florina was seated. This young lady, rising from her chair, hastened forward to bestow the most cordial welcome upon her lover's much-valued friend; and it was even with a species of paternal kindness that the old gentleman treated Florina.

"Now, I dare say," he exclaimed, making her sit beside him upon a sofa, "that you are very anxious indeed to know what has taken place between me and your aunt? Well, I think, my dear Florina—for so you must permit me to call you—that your aunt will give you the welcome intelligence that she is perfectly satisfied with a certain young gentleman's rectitude of conduct——"

"Ah, Mr. Gunthorpe!" murmured Florina, with blushes upon her cheeks and the light of joy dancing in her beauteous eyes; "how can I sufficiently thank you for having thus cleared up the character of one——"

"Whom you love so dearly—eh?" interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe. "Ah! you need not throw that dismayed look at your aunt. She will not reproach you for having kept this love a secret from her. She knows everything now."

"Yes, dearest Florina," said Lady Macdonald, speaking with a most affectionate kindness; "Mr. Gunthorpe has told me everything, and I shall not chide you. To tell you the truth, for the last two or three weeks I have myself entertained serious misgivings as to whether your happiness was being truly and really consulted by this engagement with Lord Saxondale. But now I can hesitate no longer in giving you the assurance that it must be broken off."

"Oh, my dear aunt!" exclaimed the beauteous girl, bounding from her seat and embracing Lady Macdonald fervently. "You know not what happiness your words have given me! It was only in obedience to your wishes that I ever consented to receive a suit all along so odious to me."

"We will say no more upon that part of the subject, my dear Flo," interrupted her ladyship. "Mr. Gunthorpe has made me fully aware of the impropriety and imprudence of opposing the natural current of the heart's affections. Besides, Florina, I have ceased to entertain any respect for Lady Saxondale. I have heard such sad things concerning her——But you are already acquainted with them all: Mr. Deveril has informed you of everything."

"And Mr. Deveril will receive permission," added Mr. Gunthorpe, "to pay his respects to you, Florina, at your aunt's house."

Need we say that a still sunnier joy than her eyes had already shown, now danced in those beauteous orbs—or that still deeper blushes appeared upon Florina's cheeks? This was indeed a moment of happiness well and amply repaying her for any past sorrows she had endured. Again did she embrace her aunt; and then returning to her seat by Mr. Gunthorpe's side, she took his hand, and pressed it gratefully to her lips.

"But what about my poor brother?" she said, after a pause, and while a cloud suddenly gathered upon her brow.

"Where is he at this moment?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe. "Oh! I recollect. Your aunt told me just now: he remains at Saxondale Castle—having been thrown from a horse about a week back. But fortunately he has received no serious hurt. Now, Florina, the conduct of your brother is far from satisfactory to those who are interested in him: but he must be left to his own course for the present."

"Ah! I have the most serious apprehensions on this account!" exclaimed Florina. "I fear lest that wicked woman Lady Saxondale—"

"Well, but we must talk no more upon that subject now," interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe. "From all I know of your brother, he is not a man to be either persuaded or coerced into one particular course when he has set his mind on another. However, do not be afraid that he will be altogether lost sight of——"

At this moment the door opened, and a domestic entered to announce that Lord Saxondale had just called. Both Lady Macdonald and Florina threw quick glances of inquiry upon Mr. Gunthorpe to ascertain from his looks what course he would recommend: and he at once made a sign that the young nobleman should be shown up.

"It will be as well," he said, when the domestic had quitted the room, "that this stripling should be frankly dealt with at once; and as the opportunity presents itself, let the explanation take place in my presence. You, Lady Macdonald, must speak; but rest assured that I shall come to your rescue, if he dares display any of his flippant impertinence."

Scarcely had Mr. Gunthorpe finished speaking, when the door opened again, and Lord Saxondale was announced. Apprehensive, as the reader was already seen, that his affair with Emily Archer might be known in Cavendish Square, he had determined to put a bold face on the matter: and therefore he was entering the room with a jaunty free-and-easy look and manner, when he was taken considerably aback on beholding Mr. Gunthorpe. For knowing that the old gentleman had been in Lincolnshire at the time of the murder, he could not help fancying that his presence at Lady Macdonald's on this occasion, was to give some explanation or warning not altogether favourable to his (Saxondale's) engagement with Florina. He therefore started, and stopped short for a moment: but quickly recovering his effrontery, he exclaimed, "Ah, Mr. Gunthorpe! What—are *you* here?"

"You see that I am:" responded the old gentleman, "and this time, Lord Saxondale, I do not think that you will threaten to have me kicked out of the house, as you did when last we met—which was in Park Lane."

"Oh! never mind the past," ejaculated the young nobleman, looking somewhat confused however; then advancing towards the young lady, he extended his hand, saying, "Well, Flo, so you have got back from Lincolnshire?"

She did not accept the proffered hand; and her look remained grave—but no word passed her lips.

"Cool, eh?" muttered Lord Saxondale to himself: then turning towards the aunt, he said, "And how is your ladyship? Why, what the deuce is the matter? You all seem so uncommonly serious!"

"Perhaps your lordship will sit down," interrupted Lady Macdonald, pointing to a chair at a little distance from the group: "for it is necessary that you should receive a certain explanation from my lips."

Edmund took the chair accordingly, and endeavoured to assume—or rather to persevere in the assumption of an offhand and unconcerned manner: but he nevertheless felt confused and uneasy.

"My lord," continued Lady Macdonald, "from some additional particulars which have appeared in the newspapers relative to a certain lamentable tragedy—and which particulars cannot have escaped your notice—it is but too evident that one of the unfortunate victims had for several weeks past been living under your protection."

"Well, what of it?" ejaculated Edmund. "I am not married to Flo yet; and of course should have cut the concern as soon as we were married. These things are always done by young men; and I don't suppose you want to make me an exception to the general rule."

"It is not to argue the point, Lord Saxondale," said Mr. Gunthorpe, with a severe look, "that her ladyship was addressing you—but to make a certain announcement which it is needful you should hear."

"Oh, I can guess what's coming!" cried Edmund snappishly: "but I am not to be put off so easy, I can tell you. What the deuce, Mr. Gunthorpe, have you got to do with the business? why are you poking your nose in the affair? And by the bye, if you have been telling any tales about me, I can tell one about you. That day you dined with Lord Harold in Jermyn Street, didn't you get most blazing drunk?"

"No, sir," responded Mr. Gunthorpe sternly: "I affected to be overcome with liquor, in order that I might see the extent to which Lord Harold and yourself would go in your endeavours to enmesh me in your snares. If Lord Harold showed you the next day the letter which I sent him, you must have seen full well that not for a single moment was I made your dupe. I suffered myself to be robbed of a few thousand pounds for a certain reason of my own——But of that no matter. You would now do well to attend to what Lady Macdonald may have to say."

"Well then, what is it?" demanded Edmund, his lips trembling with rage as he bent his spiteful looks upon Florina's aunt—while the young damsel herself sat by Mr. Gunthorpe's side, grave and serious, and with her eyes bent down.

"I do not wish, Lord Saxondale," resumed Lady Macdonald, "to touch more than is necessary upon that lamentable occurrence which, if you possess any heart at all, must have affected you. But it is necessary for me to state that I consider your conduct in maintaining such a connexion while formally engaged to my niece, to have been most disgraceful. Therefore, you cannot be surprised when I request that you will consider her engagement with yourself to exist no longer."

"Indeed, I shall consider nothing of the sort!" he exclaimed flippantly. "I am well aware that Flo loves me—I am sure of it—although she may be offended at the moment."

"Lady Florina Staunton," said the aunt, with severe tone and look "has only been kept in the room during this unpleasant scene, that she may, if necessary, give from her own lips an assurance entirely corroborative of mine."

"What!" ejaculated Edmund: "do you mean to tell me, Flo, that you don't love me? I'm sure you won't say *that*."

"I am compelled to speak plainly and frankly in this matter," replied the young maiden, with a modest dignity. "I am desirous, Lord Saxondale, that the engagement should be broken off between us."

"It is you who have done this mischief!" cried the nobleman, starting up from his seat and addressing Mr. Gunthorpe menacingly. "You are poking your nose in everywhere—bullying my mother in the first place—and now thrusting yourself into my affairs. What the deuce does it all mean? and pray who are you?"

"Lord Saxondale," said the old gentleman, slowly rising from the sofa and bending a stern look upon the aristocratic stripling, "it is altogether useless for you to affect the airs of the bully with me. If you dare to talk thus in the presence of one of your own sex, it is not difficult to imagine what your conduct would be before these ladies, were they unprotected and alone."

"Oh! don't take things up quite so sharp," ejaculated Edmund, overawed by the old gentleman's demeanour: then turning to Lady Macdonald, he said, "I hope you will forgive me for the past—I don't wan't to break off with Flo—I am very fond of her—and I will turn over a new leaf and be quite steady. Indeed, I mean to leave London for two or three months: I have just been with Lord Petersfield, who is going as Ambassador-Extraordinary to Vienna—and I am to accompany him. The fact is, I am heartily sick of the life I have been leading, and want change of scene: but if you desire it, Lady Macdonald, I will stay in London, and show you that I can become more steady."

"I am glad, Edmund," said her ladyship, in a kinder tone than she had before used, "to hear you talk in this manner; and I do most sincerely hope that you will reform. I think you would do well to absent yourself for a time—especially as you are going with your guardian Lord Petersfield—a nobleman of such high honour and integrity——"

Here a suppressed ejaculation from Mr. Gunthorpe drew all attention towards him; but he suddenly fell into a fit of coughing so as to cover the abrupt paroxysm of grief and rage into which that eulogy upon Lord Petersfield had thrown him.

"Yes, Edmund," continued Lady Macdonald, "you will do well to proceed to the Continent. But the decision which you have heard pronounced, is irrevocable; and from this moment you must look upon Florina only as a mere acquaintance. I shall to-morrow write to Lady Saxondale to inform her that the engagement is broken off."

Edmund turned abruptly away—muttered some threatening words to Mr. Gunthorpe, who heeded them not—and flung himself out of the room, banging the door violently behind him. A few minutes afterwards Mr. Gunthorpe himself took his departure, and entering his carriage, ordered it to drive to William Deveril's villa near the Regent's Park.

He found our young hero and Angela walking together in their little garden. The beautiful maiden was now fully acquainted with her brother's love for Florina; and we need scarcely say that she entertained the most fervent hope it would be crowned with happiness. They knew that Mr. Gunthorpe had written to Lady Macdonald at Saxondale Castle—knew also that in this letter he had made an appointment to call upon her at her own house in Cavendish Square on that particular afternoon of which we are speaking—and they therefore expected that he would call at their villa on his way back to Stamford Hill. Nor were they disappointed: for at about five o'clock in the evening, their worthy old friend made his appearance. Most cordial was the greeting he received from the brother and sister: they conducted him into their tastefully furnished parlour—and he gladly accepted of some refreshments; for he had taken nothing since he left his own house in the morning.

Not a single word to William and Angela did Mr. Gunthorpe breathe of the circumstances which had so deeply saddened him that day: but when he had taken a glass of wine and a mouthful of food, he proceeded to speak upon the subject for which he had specially called on the present occasion.

"I told you, my dear young friends," he said, "that I wrote four days back to Lady Macdonald at Saxondale Castle, explaining to her sufficient to make her comprehend the necessity of withdrawing herself and her niece at once from Lady Saxondale's society. Lady Macdonald, not choosing to break with Lady Saxondale abruptly until she should have received fuller particulars from my lips, proffered some pretext to account for the speedy departure of herself and Florina from the castle. They arrived in town yesterday; and just now, according to an intimation which I gave Lady Macdonald in my letter, I called in Cavendish Square. Need I tell you, William, that you now stand higher in Lady Macdonald's opinion than ever! need I assure you that she is fully convinced of your innocence and of Lady Saxondale's guilt? But there is one piece of intelligence which I must hasten to give you: which is, that the engagement is broken off with Lord Saxondale—and you are now the accepted suitor of Lady Florina Staunton."

A cry of joy, fervid and enthusiastic, burst from the lips of William Deveril, as he threw himself upon his knees, and taking Mr. Gunthorpe's hand, pressed it between both his own. Tears of mingled gratitude and delight trickled from the dark eyes of the lovely Angela; and Mr. Gunthorpe was deeply affected by the scene of happiness which he thus witnessed and of which he was the author.

He soon afterwards took his departure; but on his way back to his own mansion at Stamford Hill, he stopped for a few moments at Mrs. Leyden's dwelling to inform Henrietta that he was perfectly satisfied with the result of his interview with Adolphus at Mrs. Chandos's cottage, and that she had every hope of bliss to anticipate from that young nobleman's love. Thus did the old gentleman, while his own heart was secretly devoured with care, busy himself to promote the happiness of others; and to a certain extent it was a relief to his own sorrows that he was enabled to do so.

At eleven o'clock on the following day, Mr. Gunthorpe's carriage again drew up in front of the picturesque cottage near Edmonton. Elizabeth immediately came forth to welcome the old gentleman; and she informed him that her brother and Adolphus had gone out together for a long ramble in the neighbouring lanes and fields.

"I am glad of it," said Mr. Gunthorpe, kindly but mournfully; "for I wish to have a serious—a very serious conversation with you. Will you be enabled to give me two or three hours of your time this morning?"

"Yes—assuredly," responded Elizabeth: but she was struck by the mournfulness of Mr. Gunthorpe's look and manner—and the truth flashed in unto her mind.

The old gentleman dismissed his carriage for the present, bidding the coachman return at two o'clock; and he then entered the parlour with Lady Bess.

Closing the door, she looked him full in the face—but yet with an expression of profound sorrow and humiliation on her features—saying, "Mr. Gunthorpe, do you not despise me? do you not scorn and loathe me?"

"My God, no!" he ejaculated with a strange excitement: and taking her hand, he pressed it long and warmly, while the tears ran down his cheeks. "You suspect, Elizabeth, that I have learnt something concerning you——"

"Yes—I see it in your manner—I know that you have!" she answered, weeping. "But how is it possible that you could come near me again? how is it that you can thus demonstrate so much kind and generous feeling towards me? Who are you, Mr. Gunthorpe? Tell me who you are! That is a question which I have asked myself a thousand times since you were here yesterday—a question that I must ask a thousand times again until you solve it!'

"I cannot now, Elizabeth," replied the old gentleman. "But shortly—very shortly—I may do so. Suffice it for you to know that I entertain the warmest and sincerest interest in your behalf."

"Oh, that proof of munificence which you left with me yesterday!" exclaimed Lady Bess. "It is a fortune! But see—I have not dared to avail myself of your bounty! I give it you back again: for now that you know all, you must feel how thoroughly unworthy I am of your kindness:"—and as she spoke, she drew forth from her bosom the cheque which Mr. Gunthorpe had left on the preceding day.

"Keep it, Elizabeth—keep it—it is your's" he said, gently pushing back her hand which held the draft. Would to heaven that ten thousand times the amount would redeem the past!"

"Ah, would that I *could* redeem it!" ejaculated Elizabeth: "but at least I may atone for it—and most solemn is my resolve to make such atonement."

"I came not to reproach you, my dear Elizabeth," said Mr. Gunthorpe, still profoundly affected——" but to hear from your lips the narrative of that Past for which you promise atonement. I am sure you will not refuse me your confidence."

"No—not for world's!" cried Lady Bess, with unfeigned sincerity. "Your goodness towards me demands it—and I feel also, without knowing why, that you have a right to expect it. Most sacredly do I assure you, Mr. Gunthorpe, that my mind was made up to tell you everything the next time you called, even though you should not have elsewhere discovered that dread secret which has filled you with so much generous affliction on my behalf. Oh! but I have been haunted by the fear, ever since you left this house yesterday, that you would never return! I was seized with a presentiment that you were going somewhere to make inquiries that would bring to your knowledge this sad phase in my eventful life; and methought that if you did thus learn it, you would cast me out with scorn and loathing from your memory."

"No, Elizabeth--I could not do that," said Mr. Gunthorpe: "and that I could not, the proof is that I am here again to-day! And now that I have given you the assurance that it is not my purpose to reproach you, I beg you will delay not, my dear Elizabeth, in lifting the veil that covers the mystery of your life. Conceal nothing from me. Whatsoever you may have to confess, will not draw vituperation from my lips: nothing but sympathy shall flow thence. You have not known me long but perhaps you have seen enough of me to trust in this assurance?"

If any encouragement were wanting," said Elizabeth, deeply moved, "to induce me to make the fullest revelations, it has just been given in these kind words that you have spoken."

She seated herself near Mr. Gunthorpe; and in a calm firm voice, commenced her narrative in the following manner.

CHAPTER LXXX.

COMMENCEMENT OF LADY BESS'S HISTORY.

"THE earliest period of existence to which my memory can be carried back, is connected with this cottage. Here I dwelt in my infancy, with an elderly lady named Mrs. Burnaby, whom I was taught to regard as my grandmother. She was moderately off, and kept one servant. She herself instructed me in the rudiments of education: I was fond of learning, and progressed rapidly under her supervision. She was indeed very kind to me—behaving with all the affection of a near and fond relative. When I was about eight years old—I remember the incident as well as if it had only occurred yesterday—Mrs. Burnaby told me that she was going upon a little journey, that she might be absent a couple of days, and that I was to be a very good girl and mind what the female-servant said during her absence. She did remain away two days: and it was late in the evening when she returned. She was accompanied by a nurse carrying a little baby; and she told me that this little baby was my brother. I was too young to reflect upon such matters at that time; and therefore I did not think it at all extraordinary. Indeed, all my feelings were those of an enthusiastic joy at having this little brother. It was a wet nurse who had charge of him; and I was told that his name was Francis. At the expiration of some months—I suppose nine or ten—the wet-nurse went away; and a girl from the neighbourhood was hired to take charge of little Frank. He throve apace; and when he was able to run alone he became a companion for me. Full well do I remember the childish delight with which I used to lead him when we walked out with Mrs. Burnaby or the nursemaid; and as years went by and he became more companionable for me still, I loved him with the sincerest affection. He was not a strong nor healthy child, but delicate and interesting—endowed with that remarkable beauty which has accompanied his growth and which characterizes him now. I myself, on the other hand, was a strong vigorous girl—tall for my age—and totally unacquainted with even a day's indisposition. When Frank was old enough to commence learning, Mrs. Burnaby instructed him as she did me; and it gave me the sincerest delight to assist my little brother in his lessons.

"Time wore on—and the incident I am about to relate happened in the year 1832. It was then fourteen, and Frank was six. One morning Mrs. Burnaby told us that we were to be dressed in our Sunday apparel, and accompany her on a little journey. Presently a vehicle, which had been ordered from Edmonton, drove up to the door: we entered it, and proceeded to some village about ten miles distant—but I did not know the name. There we stopped at a tavern, where a splendid carriage, attended by servants in a gorgeous livery, was waiting. Mrs. Burnaby, myself and Frank took our places in this carriage; and it drove away. Speedily turning out of the main road, it entered a bye-one, running through some beautiful sylvan scenery. At the expiration of an hour a superb mansion appeared at a little distance. It wss situated upon a gentle eminence, in the middle of a park, where numerous deer were frisking about. It was a beautiful day in the middle of summer; the trees and fields were of the liveliest green—the ornamental waters in that park reflected the unclouded blue of heaven—and swans were floating in stately gracefulness upon the limpid lake. Altogether it was a scene which delighted me at the time, and made an indelible impression upon me. Through this park did the carriage proceed, until it drove up to the entrance of the mansion, where it stopped. Mrs. Burnaby alighted with us: an elderly female, looking like a housekeeper, received us as we descended from the vehicle: and a kind greeting took place between her and Mrs. Burnaby. There were evidently old acquaintances. The housekeeper—for so I shall call her—bestowed great attention on Frank and me, and seemed surprised that I should have grown such a tall girl. Perhaps she paid me some little compliments, with an admiring good-nature: but these I pass over. We were conducted up a magnificent staircase, to a bed-chamber, where a lady lay ill in the couch. She was very beautiful, though pale with sickness: she appeared to be about thirty-three years of age. There were two other ladies with her, much younger than herself—one being but little past twenty, and the other nineteen. I do not think they were sisters—for although they were both very beautiful, there was no family resemblance between them. Nor do I think they were any relation to the lady who was ill—at least so far as I could judge by the way in which they addressed her. I must however observe that neither the invalid lady nor these two younger ones called each other by any name the whole time that Frank and I were there—this reserve being doubtless a necessary but melancholy precaution to prevent us from obtaining any clue as to who they were.

"The sick lady embraced me and Frank with the utmost tenderness, and wept over us. She contemplated us with a look which I can never forget—a look of mournful fondness and sorrowing love—a look which, young though I was, nevertheless made me think that there must be some secret tie connecting my brother and myself with this lady. After remaining upwards of an hour with her, she bade us a most affectionate farewell. She gave me some advice as to my future conduct, and hinted that I was shortly to be removed from Mrs. Burnaby's and placed at school: but she assured me that I had friends in the world who would ever be watchful over my interests. Again and again did she press me and Frank to her bosom; and although I have no doubt she exerted all her energies to restrain her emotions as much as possible, yet she could not prevent them from finding an issue. Mrs. Burnaby and the housekeeper conducted us back to the carriage; and the latter female kissed us both most kindly at parting. I should observe that the two young ladies already mentioned, had likewise lavished affectionate endearments upon us. The handsome carriage took us back to the village, where we entered the hired vehicle and were borne home to the cottage.

"On the following day preparations were commenced towards fitting me out for a boarding-school. I grieved sadly when I found that I was to be separated from my dearly beloved brother: but Mrs. Burnaby consoled me with the assurance that when he was old enough he should join me in the same establishment. At the expiration of eight or ten days, the housekeeper from that splendid mansion arrived at the cottage. The moment of parting had now come; and full well do I remember the bitter, bitter tears I shed when separating from Frank and Mrs. Burnaby. The housekeeper took me into London in a hired vehicle; and thence we proceeded by coach to Southampton. There I was placed at the establishment of Mr. and Mrs. Jennings. It was a very large one, and was divided into two distinct compartments—one for boys, and one for girls,—the master presiding over the former, and the mistress over the latter. There it was that the housekeeper left me, kissing me affectionately when she went away, and giving me a well-filled purse for pocket-money. I was well treated at this school: that is to say, I experienced no unkindness.

But I need scarcely observe that I very much missed the tender care of her whom I had been taught to believe was my grandmother. Mrs. Burnaby frequently wrote kind and encouraging letters to me, and occasionally sent me little presents. I expected to go home to her at the holidays, and was sadly distressed when I was informed that I must remain at school. I wrote to Mrs. Burnaby imploring her to have me home, and telling her how much I longed to see my dear brother Frank. She wrote me back a letter full of kindness, but assuring me that circumstances compelled her to keep me at school, and enjoining me to make myself as happy as I possibly could. Frank sometimes wrote in his own little way; and I remember how I used to weep over those letters. Ah, I had been told to make myself happy—but I could not; and during the holidays, when most of the other children were away at their homes, I often used to weep and sob as if my heart would break.

"At the expiration of very nearly two years, I was one day most agreeably surprised by the presence of my brother. He told me that Mrs. Burnaby was dead, and that she was not our grandmother—indeed that she was no relation at all. He was not dressed in black; and when I spoke to the school-mistress on the subject, she told me that we were neither of us to be put into mourning. I was much afflicted at hearing of the good old lady's death: and I felt shocked at this prohibition from putting on a suitable apparel: for notwithstanding I now learnt that there was not the remotest degree of kinship between her and us, yet I thought that having so long regarded her in another light, it would have been but decent to exhibit a proper respect for her memory. Frank told me that a gentleman, whose name he did not know, had brought him to school; and it appeared that this gentleman—or rather nobleman—took his departure immediately, and did not ask to see me.

"Frank likewise told me that about ten months back he had been taken to a large building in London, where he had seen that lady again; and that she was then in perfect health. On that occasion he had for the first time beheld the nobleman who afterwards brought him to school: for that he was a nobleman, could be conjectured from the circumstance that he had worn a star upon his breast, when Frank saw him first of all. My brother likewise told me that on the previous day—that before he arrived at the school, and which was ten months after his visit to the lady at the great building in London—this same nobleman, after taking possession of Mrs. Burnaby's papers and letters, had conducted him to the splendid mansion in the park, where he saw the lady a third time, and also those two young ladies previouly mentioned. The lady whom he had been taken specially to see wept over him, murmuring that perhaps she should never see him more; and she cut off a lock of his hair. He was then consigned to the charge of that nobleman who brought him to the school at Southampton. Such was the substance of the information which Frank gave me; and amidst my grief at the death of poor Mrs. Burnaby, it was a source of comfort to have my brother beneath the same roof with myself.

"At the time of which I am now speaking, he was eight, and I was sixteen. He of course lived in the department of the establishment allotted to the boys—while I dwelt in that appropriated to the female scholars. We however saw each other for a short time every day, and for several hours on Sunday. I was therefore now much happier than I had been when at this school by myself; and I did my best to make my poor brother happy also. We were well provided with clothes by the master and mistress according as we wanted them: and we were likewise allowed a sufficiency of pocket-money. I think that Mr. and Mrs. Jennings suspected there was some strange mystery connected with us—but they evidently were not acquainted with it—or at least not in all its particulars: for Mrs. Jennings frequently questioned me in respect to my former reminiscences. I used to answer her with frankness, in the hope that she would perhaps be led to tell me something. But she never did.

"I must here observe that amongst the female-scholars at this school, there was one named Catherine Marshall. She was four years younger than myself—a fine, tall, well-made, and beautiful creature as ever I beheld. She was possessed of a merry and joyous disposition—innocently mischievous, if I may use the term—and full of frolicsome gaiety. My spirits were naturally good, notwithstanding the many depressing circumstances by which I was surrounded. Kate and I soon formed a sincere friendship for each other. When the school walked out we were always together; we sat together in the school room; and as she was somewhat idle and disliked learning, I was wont to assist her with her lessons. She was a kind-hearted generous-minded girl; and I loved her dearly. I must add that her father Mr. Marshall kept a tavern at Dover; but being well off, he was enabled to give his daughters a good education. For Kate had two sisters younger than herself; and they were at school, I believe, at Dover—the mother not liking to have them all sent away from home.

"I have said that I was sixteen when my brother came to this school. About a year afterwards Mrs. Jennings told me that I was no longer to consider myself a scholar, but was to occupy the place of junior teacher, with the ultimate view of qualifying myself as a governess, by which profession I was to earn my bread. Thus time passed on; and when I was twenty, Mrs. Jennings informed me that I was to make my preparations to enter, in the above capacity, a family that was about to visit the Continent. Kate Marshall at that time—she being sixteen—left the school. We exchanged some little momentous of our friendship; and she made me promise that if ever I had an opportunity, I would pay her a visit at Dover. But the most anguished separation was from my dear brother Frank; and when the moment for parting came, we embraced again and again, unable to tear ourselves away from each other's arms. At length we did separate: and never shall I forget the excruciating poignancy of my affliction at the moment! My boxes were conveyed to the hotel where the family was stopping: but before I took leave of Mr. and Mrs. Jennings, I besought them to treat my dear brother with all possible kindness, as I knew that he would be inconsolable at my loss. They promised that they would, and they showed some degree of feeling on parting from me.

"The family into which I now entered was that of Sir John Marston. He was then about fifty years of age: Lady Marston was two years his junior. They had a niece with them—a Mrs. Lloyd—who was a widow, and had two children. She was about thitty years old; and her children—both girls—were respectively twelve and ten. It was these two children of whose education I was to take charge. As I have already said, this family was staying at an hotel; and from what I learnt, they had only arrived from London two days previously. How they heard of me—how I became engaged to enter into their service—how long the negotiation had been carried on—in short, all circumstances leading to my entrance into this family, were totally unknown to me; and of course I did not ask the question.

On the following day we embarked on board a steam-packet bound for Havre-de-Grace: and there I found that the Marstons had a house ready provided to receive them, and where they had previously been dwelling for some time. It was there that we accordingly took up our abode; and I entered upon my duties as governess to Mrs. Lloyd's children. Under no circumstances is the occupation of a teacher a very pleasurable one: but mine was rendered double annoying by the disagreeable temper of my two pupils, and by the difficulty I experienced in giving Mrs. Lloyd satisfaction. She was constantly interfering and finding fault. Her children were rude, pert, and forward when I commenced with them; and vainly did I endeavour to improve their manners and dispositions. If I spoke harshly to them, they raised such a storm of crying, shrieking, screaming, and yelling, that the whole house grew alarmed, and I was blamed for their ill-conduct. In short, I soon found that I had entered into a kind of purgatory, and that the life I had led at the Southampton school was paradise compared to it. Sir John Marston often scolded me most brutally; Lady Marston treated me with the supremest contempt: indeed, she was kinder far to her menials than to myself. Mrs. Lloyd, as I have already said, was constantly finding fault. If I corrected the children when they did wrong—or if I let them have their own way—I was equally liable to blame; and thus I found my situation rapidly becoming intolerable. The domestics, seeing how I was treated by their master and the two ladies, followed their example; so that I could scarcely get even the most necessary services performed, and had to a great extent to do menial things for myself. I wrote frequently to Frank: but I never in my letters mentioned to him how thoroughly unhappy I was.

"Thus some months passed away; and at length, as my ideas began to grow enlarged and my experience of the world increased, I began to ask myself why I should put up with so much ill-treatment? I reasoned that if my qualifications were such as to enable me to obtain my bread at all, they would avail for the purpose in some other family than Sir John Marston's; and inspired by these reflections, I felt a certain independence of spirit growing up within me. When once this spirit had sprung into existence—or rather, when the natural strength of my mind began thus to develop itself—I assumed a loftier bearing towards those around me. One day, when the children had been guilty of some exceeding act of rudeness, I chastised them with great severity. Their cries brought up their mother Mrs. Lloyd; and she began abusing me with her usual violence. I desired her not to address me in such language—told her that she was no lady, but only fit for a fish-wife—and gave her plainly and frankly to understand that so long as I had the charge of her daughters, I was thenceforth determined to punish them whenever they deserved it. She hastened away to tell her uncle Sir John Marston, who rushed up to the nursery furious with rage. When he began storming at me, I told him he was a cowardly bully, and that he would not dare behave thus to one of his own sex. He blustered and fumed, endeavouring to break my spirit; and he even raised his hand to strike me—when I snatched up a footstool and hurled it at his head. It struck him a severe blow, but tranquillized him in a moment; and he quitted the nursery without another word. Thus far I was victorious. But presently I had to encounter the self-sufficient insolence of Lady Marston; for as I passed her on the stairs, she turned up her nose, muttering something about 'a beggarly upstart.' I at once told her that I had not the slightest doubt she was precisely what she had dared to call me; and white with rage, she hurried away. I was now perfectly triumphant. I felt glowing within me a spirit such as I had never known before; and the consciousness that I possessed it, made me happy. I suddenly felt myself above all petty tyrannies, and totally independent of my tyrants. I was therefore encouraged to prosecute the warfare against the servants; and when that very same day an impertinent minx of a housemaid refused to do something I bade her, I bestowed upon her such a sound box on the ears, that she was as much dismayed as hurt. She did not any longer refuse to follow my orders: and during all the rest of the time I was in Sir John Marston's family, I experienced no overt impertience on the part of the domestics.

"The effect which all these various proceedings produced, was perfectly astonishing: the treatment I subsequently experienced was widely different from that I had before known. I was left to manage the children as I thought fit; and the domestic obeyed my orders. But still I was resolved to take the earliest opportunity of quitting a situation which I disliked and a family that I detested. I secretly made inquiries if other English families living in Havre, required a governess—but could hear of nothing satisfactory. At length I resolved to give Sir John Marston notice to leave him, and wend my way back to England. Thereupon he gave me to understand that I was bound to him by those who had the power to bind me, until I should attain the age of twenty-one. It only wanted three months of that period; and I therefore determined to await it patiently. But still I wondered who the persons could be that exercised this invisible but powerful influence over my destinies.

"About two months after that conversation with Sir John Marston the family removed from Havre to Paris; and we took up our abode at an hotel, the Baronet alleging that he purposed to look out for a suitable residence, as he meant to fix himself permanently, or at all events for some time, in the French capital. I cared nothing about his arrangements—looking forward to the end of another month as the period of my emancipation. And now I come to the most extraordinary incident in my chequered life. It was on the morning after the attainment of my twenty-first year, that I requested an interview with Sir John Marston in order to receive whatsoever amount of money was due to me and take my leave. The request for an audience was granted; and when I repaired to the room in which he was seated alone, he manifested the most extraordinary courtesy. Desiring me to be seated, he addressed me in such a tone of urbanity and kindness that I could scarcely believe he was the same individual who used to treat me with such ruffian brutality. He commenced by stating that he was sorry if any past circumstances had rendered me unhappy while in his family, but attributed them all to hastiness of temper—for which he professed a profound sorrow. He then questioned me—as indeed he had often done before—very minutely relative to my reminiscences of the earlier portion of my life; and thinking that now I had attained my majority, and was going to leave him, he might have something important to communicate, I spoke without reserve. He then proceeded to make me the most extraordinary proposal; and although he opened his mind with cautious slowness—feeling his way as it were with the most wary circumlocution—yet the proposition, when fully developed, struck me speechless with wonder for some minutes. It was to the effect that if I would consent to marry a certain person whom he had selected, he would present me with a sum of five thousand pounds; but that he did not require me to live with this husband of his choice a day, nor an hour, nor a minute. On the contrary, he stipulated as a part of his proposition, that we were to separate immediately after the ceremony and see each other no more. When I had recovered from the astonishment into which this proposal had thrown me, I speedily reflected that it was one which, singular and indelicate though it appeared, I should nevertheless do well to accept. To a person who was about to leave a situation with only a few pounds in her pocket, and utterly uncertain how soon she could procure another—without any known friends, too, in the whole wide world—the offer of five thousand pounds was magnificently tempting. Indeed, it was a temptation too brilliant and dazzling to be refused. I therefore speedily made up my mind to accept the offer. But having no very high opinion of Sir John Marston's integrity, I insisted upon receiving the money before I would conclude the strange bargain. He told me that the moment the ceremony was over I should have to sign a certain paper without reading its contents, and that the object which he had in view would not be answered unless I affixed my name to that document. He therefore proposed that immediately after the ceremony and previous to the signing of the paper, the money should be placed in my hands. To this I consented; and Sir John Marston then told me that in a couple of hours the bridegroom would be there. I returned to my own chamber, and he immediately issued from the hotel.

"When I was alone—the children being at the time with their mother Mrs. Lloyd—I reflected upon the step I was about to take. That Sir John Marston had some deep selfish purpose to serve, there could be no doubt: but what it was, seemed impossible for me to fathom. If I rejected his proposal, how should I better myself? If a large sum of money were due to me, and he only meant to pay me a part, what measures could I take for obtaining the whole? where was I to look for the source of such money? to whom was I to address myself for information or complaint? I was profoundly anxious to escape from the thraldom of a governess's life; and here was a little fortune within my reach. All things considered, and all the circumstances being well weighed, I resolved to persevere. Thus making up my mind with coolness and firmness, I maintained a remarkable equanimity of mind,—experiencing no nervousness, nor anxiety, nor excitement. I looked upon the whole affair as a purely business-transaction, and was prepared to go through with it in that sense.

"It was a little after nine o'clock in the morning when the interview between me and Sir John Marston had occurred: it was about half-past eleven when Lady Marston and Mrs. Lloyd entered my chamber and bade me accompany them to another room. They knew what was about to take place, and spoke to me encouragingly on the subject. They were evidently fearful that I should retract my promise: and they addressed me in terms sickeningly fawning and coaxing. I gave them to understand that I required no such show of false friendship on their part—that I had made up my mind how to act, in order to serve my own views—and that if by so doing I served their's at the same time, it was through no love that I bore them. Soon afterwards Sir John Marston made his appearance, accompanied by a very handsome young Frenchman, who spoke English perfectly, and whom he introduced to me as the Marquis of Villebelle. So I was to become a Marchioness! This did not however flatter my pride in the slightest degree: for I cared nothing about artificial rank and the nauseating blazonry of titles. Nor did the agreeable person of the young Marquis produce any tender impression upon my heart; and notwithstanding his good looks, his graceful bearing, and his elegant manners, I remained perfectly willing to carry out the Baronet's conditions to their utmost limit, and separate from my intended husband the moment the ceremony should have been performed. Besides, I should have loathed myself if all in a moment I could have made up my mind to fall into the arms of a man whom I had never seen before, and whom therefore I had not been led to love.

"Well, to proceed with my narrative. No preparations in the shape of apparel were made for this singular wedding. The white veil, the virgin dress, the orange blossoms, and the bouquet, were all wanting. I was well but plainly attired, and with no one single indication that I was about to become a bride. Indeed, the other inmates of the hotel remained in perfect ignorance that any such ceremony was contemplated. Sir John and Lady Marston, Mrs. Lloyd, the Marquis of Villebelle, and myself entered, a carriage hired for the occasion and proceeded to the British Embassy, where my hand was duly united in marriage to that of the French nobleman. The chaplain, who solemnized the rite, gave me a certificate which secured about my person. We then returned to the carriage, and drove back to the hotel. There I at once took leave of the Marquis, and repaired to the room where Sir John Marston and I had held the conversation three hours back. In about twenty minutes he joined me, accompanied by an elderly French gentleman, dressed in black, and whom he introduced to me as a Notary Public This functionary produced several papers, and requested me to show him the marriage certificate. I did so: whereupon he filled up a couple of papers attesting that this certificate had been exhibited to him; and one of these duplicates he handed to me, bidding me keep it. He then produced another document, of which he likewise had a duplicate, and which set forth that for certain reasons of a delicate character, known only to the persons interested, a separation had been agreed upon between my husband and myself,—I retaining all rights over whatsoever property I might be entitled to. These papers I had to sign; and one of them was also left in my possession. Next the notary produced a still more elaborate document, and then Sir John Martson, interposing, said in French that 'the Marchioness of Villebelle was already acquainted with its contents, and it was not necessary to read it.' I was very much inclined to demur to this: but Sir John threw upon me a look which seemed to say that I was completely in his power as to the five thousand pounds; and not knowing but that I might have really been so—and indeed more than half-fancying I was—I held my peace. Thereupon Sir John drew forth his pocket-book counted down the amount of five thousand pounds in French bank-notes, and placed them near me. I signed the document, over which a large piece of blotting-paper was thrown so that I could not catch the slightest glimpse of its contents: for I have no doubt that the notary was secretly in the Baronet's pay, bribed to manage the business thus cautiously. I should observe that all the documents were in the French language, with which I am perfectly acquainted. The notary then took his departure; and I possessed myself of my five thousand pounds.

"I now intimated to Sir John Marston that I was about to quit his family at once—to which he made no objection. But he bade me wait a few minutes while he gave me a word of caution. This was to the effect that if I consulted my own interests I should do well not to mention to any persons whose friendship I might thereafter form, the peculiar circumstances under which my marriage was contracted; and he even hinted that some fraud had been committed, in which I was more or less an accomplice. I began to grow frightened: for it did not occur to me at the time that this might be merely a device on his part to intimidate me into secrecy. He however assured me that I should be perfectly safe, provided I kept my own counsel; and he farther intimated that if ever I wished to communicate with him, and should be unacquainted with his address, a letter directed to him through his English attorney, Mr. Robson, of Saville Row, London, would reach him. He told me that he had changed his mind about settling himself in Paris, and that he purposed to travel about on the Continent for some time to come. I now took leave of him. He gave me his hand at parting, and hoped that I experienced no lingering ill-will towards him. I said frankly enough that I had little cause to entertain a friendly feeling, but that as for a permanent rancour, mine was not a disposition to cherish it. On leaving Sir John, I proceeded to my own chamber to finish my arrangements for departure; and while I was thus occupied, Lady Marston and Mrs. Lloyd came to bid me farewell. I treated them precisely as I had Sir John; and having taken leave of the two girls, I entered a hackney-coach, ordering the driver to take me to another hotel. I however purposed that my stay there should be brief, inasmuch as I resolved to set off on the following day on my return to England: for I longed to embrace my brother Frank.

"I have already stated that since I left Southampton, I regularly corresponded with him. A year had now elapsed since I left him there; and by the last letter I received, I knew he was still at the seminary. I sent to make inquiries relative to the hour at which the diligence started for Havre on the following morning; and while the porter of the hotel was gone, I began to ruminate seriously upon my position. There was I, a young and unprotected woman—only twenty-one years of age, and just launched, so to speak, upon the wide wide world! I could not marry, even if I should meet with any one to gain my affections; and I felt that at my age, and not being particularly bad-looking, I should find myself exposed to offers and overtures alike honourable and dishonourable. I was prepared to accept neither; but I naturally shrank from the chance of encountering them. It therefore occurred to me that if I passed as a married woman, there would be in that title a certain protection for myself and a safe-guard for my reputation. But I did not choose to adopt my husband's name, or receive the reflection of his rank. I scorned and hated the marriage, on account of the circumstances attending it; and I despised aristocratic distinctions. I therefore resolved to remain a plain civilian; and I deliberated what name I should take: for if passing as a married woman, I could not of course retain my maiden name of *Paton*. On the table in my room at the hotel to which I had removed, were some English novels, placed there for the use of those guests who chose to avail themselves of such reading. I thought to myself that I would leave my future name to a sort of lottery; and taking up one of the volumes, I determined to adopt the first name that should meet my eye, if it were not an ugly one. In this manner did I come to dub myself *Mrs. Chandos*. It was by this name that I now had my passport made out; and on the following morning at nine o'clock, I took my place in the *coupe* of the diligence for Havre. This compartment of a French stage-coach is made for three persons; and my two companions were elderly French ladies who were also going to Havre. I was well pleased with their companionship; for they were very agreeable persons;—and the day passed quickly enough, notwithstanding the tediousness of travelling by diligence on the Continent.

"I was in the middle of the night, and while we were still at a considerable distance from Havre-de-Grace, that the diligence was suddenly attacked by a body of armed robbers, who were so numerous and so formidable that resistance on the part of the male passengers, the guard, or the postillions, was out of the question. It was in a lonely spot where the deed took place; and the banditti went to work in a most deliberate manner. They unpacked all the boxes to search for money, jewellery, or other valuables; and my five thousand pounds, which I had deposited inside my trunk, was appropriated by the plunderers. In short they carried of everything worth taking from all the passengers—purses, watches, even to the very ear-rings of the females. The two elderly ladies who were my companions, were terribly frightened; but I retained my presence of mind; for although deeply annoyed and afflicted by the loss of my money, yet I saw that no attempt would be made upon our lives. When the robbers had done their work they suffered the diligence to proceed; and in the morning I thus arrived absolutely penniless at Havre."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

CONTINUATION OF LADY BESS'S HISTORY.

"I TOOK up my quarters at an hotel, and reflected upon what course I should now pursue. I learnt on inquiry that there would be no steam-packet for Southampton for the next two days; but even if there were, and if by parting with some of my clothes I could raise money enough to pay my fare, what was the use of presenting myself in a pauperized condition to my poor brother? I knew that he had no funds wherewith to assist me: and moreover, I shrank from the idea of afflicting him by an account of my misfortunes. What was I to do? My position was most embarrassing. I did not however suffer myself to be completely cast down: the same spirit which had animated me in dealing with the petty tyrants of the family which I had so recently left, inspired me now with courage to meet my misfortunes. At first I thought of writing at once to Sir John Marston, telling him how I was situated and requesting his pecuniary assistance. But when I reflected on the independent manner in which I had left him, my soul recoiled from the idea of such self-humiliation. The only course open to me appeared to be that of obtaining a situation as a governess; and this I thought would not be so very difficult, as there were many English residents in Havre, as well as respectable French tradesmen, who knew that I had been a year with Sir John Marston's family. I accordingly set about instituting immediate inquiries. The robbery of the diligence was of course generally known in Havre; and it being likewise known that I was one of the victims, my position excited some degree of sympathy. An English lady, named Knight, who had recently been left a widow, and had several children, was staying at Havre at the time; and she offered to receive me as a governess. She frankly told me that she was not very well off, and that she could not afford to give me a handsome salary: but my circumstances did not permit me to be over particular—and I therefore accepted her proposition. She was a woman of about forty: her eldest son, whose christian name was James, was just one-aid-twenty; and she had four other children—two boys and two girls, whose ages ranged from ten to eighteen. She was a good-natured person—somewhat weak-minded—and entirely under the empire of her son James, who, I must observe, was a handsome young man. Her husband had been dead about eight months: he was a merchant—but had left his circumstances in a less flourishing condition than had been expected from his mode of life. He had some little property at Barcelona in Spain: and it required the widow's presence there for her to take possession of it. She had arrived from England on her way thither; and as I found, more from compassion in respect to myself than because her views were sufficiently settled to enable her to engage a governess at the time, she received me into her family. In a few weeks we set off by the diligence towards the Spanish frontier. I soon found that James Knight had taken it into his head to make a conquest of me, if possible—and not in an honourable way. When unperceived by his mother, he besieged me with attentions; and even in her presence he sometimes looked and spoke in a manner that it was impossible to understand. On these occasions I saw that she reproved him with a glance, for which however he cared but little. She was however soon satisfied that he received no encouragement from me: for I gave him to understand as plainly as I could that his attentions were most disagreeable. But he persevered in them; and on one occasion it became necessary for me to resent his impertinence with a sound box on the ears, which I hesitated not to bestow. He was of an evil disposition—treacherous, malignant, and spiteful to a degree; and finding that so far from making any tender impression on me, I treated him in this manner, he menaced me with his looks. For these however I cared but little; and deported myself towards him with aversion and contempt. He grew sullen and morose; and I saw full well that he had conceived a bitter hatred against me. Under these circumstances was it that we arrived at Barcelona. I do not pause to say anything particular relative to the children entrusted to my charge, as I remained so short a time with Mrs. Knight: but I now come to the incident which caused me to leave her abruptly. On arriving at Barcelona, we took up our quarters at an hotel preparatory to the hiring of suitable apartments during the period that it would be requisite for Mrs. Knight to remain in that city. The very day after our arrival, and at about eight o'clock in the evening, Mrs. Knight discovered that some articles of jewellery had been abstracted from her trunk. This announcement was made in the presence of her son James; and he immediately turned towards me, asking with a malignant look 'what I was doing in his mother's chamber about an hour back?' Instantaneously understanding the nature of the aspersion he intended to throw upon me, my indignation burst forth in no measured terms: for it was totally false that I had been to his mother's room at all. He vowed that I had; and insisted that my boxes should be searched. This I at once assented to: whereupon Mrs. Knight, who, poor weak-minded woman, had begun to grow suspicious concerning me, led the way to my chamber, followed by her son and myself. On our way thither, the thought—the terrible thought, flashed to my mind that if James Knight were villain enough to accuse me thus wrongfully, he was also sufficiently treacherous and a malignant to have placed the jewels in my box in order to ruin me. I beheld at a glance all the danger of my position; and in the swift brief moments that were passing I resolved in my mind the two alternatives that lay before me—either to dare the accusation boldly on the one hand,—or to fly from it precipitately on the other. Though perfectly innocent, as God is my judge, yet I chose the latter alternative: for I could not endure the thought of being plunged into a prison. I therefore determined to escape. We entered my chamber; and in order to throw the treacherous young man entirely off his guard with respect to my intention, I affected not to entertain the slightest suspicion that the jewels would really be found in my box, I was thus enabled, when he was busily engaged in turning out all the things, to snatch up a bonnet and shawl and glide from the room. Locking the door upon Mrs. Knight and her son, I slipped on the bonnet and shawl—reached the staircase—descended it rapidly—and issued forth from the hotel. It was now dusk; and I sped precipitately along the street—gained the postern—passed the fortifications without hindrance—and was soon on the wide open plain stretching towards the Catalonion Hills. I proceeded onward with but little relaxation of speed for nearly two hours.—when I was compelled to sit down and rest. It was now a beautiful moonlit night and I could see to a considerable distance. Three or four habitatians were discernible amidst the sylvan scenery which formed a large portion of the landscape: but I dared not seek shelter at any of these, for fear that if information had been given to the Barcelonese police, the entire neighbourhood might be scoured by those officers and I should be arrested. I therefore resolved to walk onward throughout the whole night, and thus place as great a distance as possible between myself and the city which I had left.

"Having rested as long as I dared, I pursued my way again. I had purposely stricken out of the main road, and was plunging deeper and deeper into the wilds and fastnesses of Catalonia. I had read of the generous disposition and high-minded nature of the Catalans—and resolved, when morning dawned, and I had travelled far enough to be beyond the reach of pursuit, to stop at some cottage and ask for food and shelter: for I had a little money in my pocket which I had received from Mrs. Knight. My spirits did not flag: indeed there was something wildly romantic and exhilarating in this journey, amidst the bold and striking scenery which the powerful offulgence of moon and stars brought out in strong relief. It must not be however thought that I was indifferent to the suspicions of guilt in respect to the jewels, which would be naturally confirmed by my precipitate flight: but I resolved, so soon as I should have an opportunity, to write a letter containing the requisite explanations to Mrs. Knight, showing the infamons conduct of her son and how I had fled as the only alternative to escape a prison.

"I pressed courageously forward, stopping every now and then to sit down upon a stone or a bank but gallantly battling against increasing fatigue. Thus I continued my way till morning dawned: and now I was in the midst of all the characterirtic scenery of the immense principality of Catalonia. Barren rocks and fertile valleys—groves of cork trees—cascades and torrents—limpid streamlets and roaring waterfalls—these were the principle features which nature presented to my view. When the sun was rising over the orient hills, I sat down upon the slope of an eminence, now no longer able to combat against the sense of fatigue. A smiling valley intersected with a rivulet, spread itself out at my feet; and behind me the wild barren hills rose in amphitheatrical grandeur. Not a habitation was to be seen. I had frequently slaked my thirst during the night's wanderings; for there had been no lack of springs and rivulets in the path which I had pursued: but I was now tortured with the gnawing pangs of hunger—and the dread apprehension began to creep shudderingly over me, that it was possible for me to starve amidst these Catalonian wilds. My hope that I should reach some hospitable cottage, appeared to be disappointed: and I felt that I must rest some hours before I could resume my wanderings with ease or speed. While I was thus giving way to the disagreeable reflections that began to steal over me, I heard footsteps suddenly approaching from behind, and starting up, I beheld a figure that I must describe. It was that of a man at least six feet high, symmetrically but strongly built, his form being alike muscular and elegant. He appeared to be about thirty years of age, and was perhaps one of the handsomest men I had ever seen in my whole life. His complexion, naturally of Spanish swarthiness, was more deeply bronzed by exposure to the scorching sun; but it had an olive clearness through which the warm blood could mantle upon that fine countenance. His eyes were dark, but full of fire—looking like jet that burns without losing its sable hue. His features were of the purely Grecian cast: and his teeth were truly splendid. His long black hair, the least thing coarse—but glossy and curling naturally, and of remarkable luxuriance—fell upon his shoulders. He wore a moustache, but neither beard nor whiskers, and thus appeared even younger than he really was. He was dressed in the picturesque Catalan costume, and carried a rifle in his hand. His belt was furnished with pistols and daggers; and by his side hung a straight sword of immense length. He might either have been a guerilla or a bandit chief—I knew not which at the moment: but I strongly suspected the latter.

"I must here observe that this was the middle of September, 1839; and the Carlist war was just concluded. Don Carlos had passed with the bulk of his army into France: but Cabrera, one of his most famous generals, still continued in Spain at the head of a large body of troops. He was not however at that time in Catalonia—but I believe in the Basque Province; while Catalonia itself had become almost completely pacified. The Catalan whom I have described, and whom I thus encountered at sunrise in the midst of his own native wilds, stood gazing upon me for upwards of a minute in speechless astonishment. And no wonder that such should have been his feeling: For I doubtless appeared to him like a person dropped from the clouds in that lonely region. But blended with his look of surprise was an expression of admiration: and suspecting that I was not a Spanish woman, he at length addressed me in the French tongue. He spoke with mildness and courtesy, asking me whether I had not lost my way, and whether he could be of any assistance to me? I replied frankly that I had wandered the whole night—that I was exhausted with fatigue and famished with hunger—and that I required both repose and refreshment. Without asking another question, he courteously invited me to accompany him, assuring me of kind treatment. I showed by my looks and manner that I put confidence in him; and he led the way up the eminence, until we reached a winding path which descended somewhat precipitately between two walls of rock, which grew higher and higher in proportion as we went lower and lower. The path continued its tortuous way almost completely round the hill, until it reached a valley on the opposite side; and there I beheld a little encampment, consisting of half-a-dozen tents pitched upon the bank of a streamlet. A fire was burning in the open air, and over it a cauldron was suspended in true gipsy fashion. A dozen men, dressed and armed in a manner similar to the individual who was guiding me thither, were lounging about, most of them smoking; and four or five women, in the picturesque Catalan attire, added to the interest of the scene. These women were young and beautiful: the men were all fine athletic fellows, and the age of none appeared to exceed forty. I immediately became the object of curiosity and attention on the part of these persons: but the curiosity partook not of rudeness, while the attention was courteous and kind. Two of the young women spoke French; and thus I was enabled to understand what they said. I may here at once observe—what I did not discover till later in the day—that the individual who had brought me thither, was the chief of this band, and was styled Don Diego Christoval; but what the occupations of the band itslf were, I did not so speedily ascertain. Don Christoval bade the women bustle about and supply me with refreshments. I was introduced into one of the tents, where bedding was stretched upon the ground; and there the two women who spoke French, desired me to repose myself. This invitation I gratefully accepted. Hot coffee, eggs, biscuits, and butter, together with some cold meat, was speedily served up: and I made a copious meal. The women then bade me rest myself as long as I thought fit,—promising that I should not be disturbed, for that the encampment would remain in that spot for some days. I thanked them for their kindness; and they left me, closing the canvass of the tent over the entrance.

"I slept soundly for several hours. Indeed, it was not till late in the afternoon that I awoke; and then I was completely refreshed. Presently the handsome countenance of one of the women peeped into the tent; and perceiving that I was awake, she pointed to certain arrangements which she had made for my comfort while I had been steeped in slumber. On a rudely constructed table all the necessary materials for ablutions and the toilet were spread; and as these details are not without their interest, I may add that I found a hair-brush, a comb, nail and tooth brushes, all completely new, together with fragrant Barcelonese soap, and perfumed oil for the hair. There was likewise a change of linen; and, in short, every care had been taken to minister to my wants and comforts. All this was cheering enough; and I could not help feeling rejoiced at having fallen into such comfortable quarters. The young woman, whose name was Isabella, assisted me in my toilet; and when it was completed, she invited me to join the rest in partaking of the afternoon meal. On issuing forth from the tent, I found a complete banquet spread upon the grass—the whole arrangements having the air of an English picnic. There were roast capons, messes of smoked ham, piles of sausages, huge pieces of cheese, vegetables, bread, biscuits, and quantities of grapes and other fruits. The cauldron was again simmering over the fire; and this huge iron vessel contained the favourite Spanish comestible, called *pochero*—a sort of soup with quantities of various kinds of meat, poultry and game. Plates, dishes, and all the requisite articles of crockery and cutlery were likewise at hand; and there was no deficiency of wine and spirits. The men and women of the band were already seated at the banquet, which they had not however commenced, courteously waiting for my appearance. Don Diego Christvoal, rising up from the grass, doffed his cap in graceful salutation; and taking me by the hand, invited me to place myself next to him. We accordingly sat down—and the festival commenced. But little conversation took place during the repast, every one having an appetite so keen as to cause ample justice to be done to the good things above enumerated. When it was over, the men lighted their pipes, and lounging upon the grass, smoked and drank at their ease: but Don Diego, who, it appeared, was not addicted to the use of tobacco, proposed to me, if I were not still too much fatigued, to walk with him along the bank of the streamlet. Supposing that he wished to speak to me relative to my circumstances, I accepted the invitation, and we rambled away from the encampment.

"At first he expressed a hope that I was satisfied with the attention shown me, and that I had found everything as comfortable as, considering the limited and rude nature of the arrangements, I could have expected. When I had given a suitable response, declaring my gratitude for the treatment I have received, he intimated that if I thought fit to give any explanation relative to the circumstances which had brought me into those wilds, he was prepared to listen: but he at the same time, with much mingled frankness and delicacy, assured me that if I preferred remaining silent upon the subject, he would not press me, nor should my treatment undergo any change so long as I might choose to remain with the band. I did not think fit to enter into full particulars relative to the jewels; but I gave him to understand that I had fled precipitately from Barcelona in order to escape a cruel persecution at the hands of the son of a lady in whose family I had occupied the position of a governess. Don Diego was perfectly satisfied with this explanation; and he asked what he could do to serve me; I replied that my object was to return to France. He said that it was his intention to remain for a few days in the present neighbourhood, but that afterwards he and his band would be pushing their way towards the Pyrenees: and that if I thought fit to remain with them during this short interval, he would himself conduct me across the Pyrenean boundary into France. I accepted this offer at once, and for several reasons. In the first place, I had not sufficient money to travel by any public conveyance; and I did not like to expose my necessitous position to Don Diego, or receive pecuniary assistance from him. In the second place, even if I had possessed ample funds, I should not have liked to trust myself to a public conveyance: for I knew not to what extent James Knight's malignity might have reached, and I thought it quite probable that he would give such publicity to the incident of the jewels that should lead to my arrest, if from a personal description I chanced to be recognized, Moreover, it would be impossible to travel without a passport: and mine would betray me to the authorities as the fugitive governess from Barcelona, supposing that James Knight had really made the matter public. In the third place, I was sufficiently interested in my new companions to entertain the wish of beholding somewhat more of their mode of life, in which there was a certain romantic charm for such a disposition as mine. These were the principal motives that at once prompted me to accept Christoval's proposal that I should remain for a few days with his band.

"A week thus passed. Every morning at day-break the men of the band, headed by Don Diego, set out from the encampment, and did not return until late in the afternoon,—when they found the banquet ready prepared for them by the women. These women were the wives, or perhaps the mistresses, of certain members of the band: but neither of them pertained to Don Diego. Their conduct was unexceptionably correct; and if they were not really wives, they at all events behaved with the discretion and decency of married women. When the men returned of a day, they were invariably laden with provisions of all kinds; and I noticed that of an evening they all assembled in Don Diego's own tent, where they remained for about half-an-hour, either in consultation or else in dividing other things which they had obtained during the day in addition to the provisions and wine. That this latter business was really the one that occupied them on those occasions, I gradually began to suspect: for I often heard the sounds of chinking gold emanate from the chief's tent Moreover, I began to notice that the women varied the articles of jewellery which they wore, and which were exceedingly costly and handsome. In short, at the expiration of the week I acquired the certainty that I had fallen in with a horde of banditti. I therefore longed for the fulfilment of Don Diego's promises that he would conduct me into France. But the second week was entered upon, and nothing was said concerning the subject. I continued to receive the kindest attentions; and if I ever offered to assist the women in preparing the repasts, they would not suffer me to do any menial thing. They conceived the utmost friendship for me; and Isabella, the most beautiful of all, was unremitting in her attentions. Two or three times Christoval asked me to walk with him: but his manner was always that of respectful courtesy, mingled however with the evidences of a growing admiration. I found him to be a man of intelligent and cultivated mind. He was well read in Spanish and French literature: his manners were not merely gentlemanly—they were elegant; and his conversation was varied, amusing, and instructive. At the expiration of the second week I took an opportunity of inquiring when he proposed to advance towards the Pyrenees, from which we were about forty miles distant. A cloud immediately gathered upon his countenance; and bending his dark eyes somewhat reproachfully upon me, he asked in a mournful voice if I were anxious to leave those who experienced so much delight and gratification at my presence amongst them? I answered him frankly, that I was anxious to make my way back to England, in order to earn my livelihood by my own industry, instead of being a burden on the kindness of strangers. He assured me, with impassioned vehemence, that so far from being a burthen, I was the most welcome of guests; and he added that circumstances would compel the band to remain in that same spot for another fortnight, during which he besought me to tarry amongst them. Perceiving that I was embarrassed how to answer, he addressed me gravely in the following manner :—

"It would be ridiculous, Senora Chandos, to suppose that you do not suspect what we are. I must however, for my own sake, give you some explanations. In me you behold a Spanish nobleman, bearing the rank of Count, and descended from one of the oldest families of Catalonia. But when I inherited my father's title, the family estate was so impoverished that I found myself a man of broken fortunes. I sold all that was left, and joined the cause of Don Carlos, with the rank of Captain in his army. Whether I have conducted myself as a gallant cavalier. is not for me to say: suffice it for my lips to proclaim, that where the fight has ever been thickest, there was I to be found. The recent treachery of Maroto, in signing a capitulation with the Queen's general Espartero, annihilated my royal master's cause. Two alternatives then became present to my contemplation—either to throw down my arms and acknowledge Queen Isabella, or to fly into France. No—there was another course to be pursued; and that was to associate myself with a few men, gallant and desperate as I am, and adopt a wild predatory life such as you behold us leading. The world will doubtless call us banditti—and we are so: but on entering upon this career, solemn oaths were registered amongst us, to the effect that we should never plunder the poor, but only the rich—and that on no occasion should we use unnecessary violence, much less spill human blood. Those were our oaths; and they have become our laws. You now know, Senora, who and what we are, if indeed you were not previously aware of it. Perhaps you tremble lest we live in a constant state of danger: but this is not so. The Queen's troops are still too much occupied in making head against Cabrera, to overrun the wilds of Catalonia for the extermination of such bands as that of which I am the chief: for there are many such bands at present scattered about the mountainous regions of this principality. For years to come may we safely continue our present pursuits. And now, perhaps, you will wonder wherefore instead of adopting this course of life, I have not joined the forces still united under the command of General Cabrera? The explanation can be given in a few words. An insult I received at his hands, and which as a junior officer I could not at the time resent, has engendered so strong a feeling of personal dislike towards the chief, that I could not serve under him."

"Count Christoval ceased speaking; and I remained wrapped up in deep meditation. His narrative had touched me profoundly: I could not find it in my heart to blame him—scarcely think the worse of him—for having adopted this mode of life. Indeed it was impossible to wonder that he had done so; and I knew, moreover, that these circumstances were invested in the eyes of Spaniards with much less moral degradation and dishonouring taints than in other countries. It was likewise a source of satisfaction and an infinite relief to my mind to learn that I was not the associate of blood-stained murderers—but that these men entertained, after their own fashion, certain notions of a correct and proper nature. I had received so much generous attention and delicate kindness at their hands, as well as on the part of the women, that I could not possibly insist upon quitting them at once without appearing ungrateful for all that hospitable treatment. Therefore when my meditation was over, I intimated to Don Diego my willingness to abide with his band for another fortnight; but I was somewhat troubled when I beheld the glow of fervid delight and enthusiastic joy which suddenly animated his countenance: for I feared that he entertained towards me a sentiment which I could not possibly reciprocate. He saw that I was thus troubled; and again did the melancholy cloud settle upon his features. Then he hastened to change the conversation, and broke off into a lively strain of discourse, mingled with anecdotes of the late Carlist warfare."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

CONTINUATION OF LADY BESS'S HISTORY.

"THE fortnight passed away; and during this interval I avoided as much as possible finding myself alone with Don Diego Christoval. He saw that such was my endeavour; and with a delicacy which I could not help appreciating, he no longer asked me to join him in his evening ramble, though at meal-times his attentions towards me were most assiduous. When those two additional weeks had expired, I waited anxiously for some word or sign indicative of a removal; and I was well pleased when I heard Don Diego give orders one evening that on the following day we were to set out. Accordingly at an early hour in the morning, the encampment was broken up: the horses which belonged to the band, and which were kept in an immense cave serving the purpose of a stable, were brought forth. There were steeds enough for us all, women included; and even then there remained a couple to serve as pack-horses for the conveyance of the tents and the baggage. We proceeded slowly, in consequence of the difficult nature of the ground which we had to traverse. I rode at the head, in company with Don Diego; and the time passed rapidly away, thus beguiled by his agreeable conversation. I could see that he loved me—that he entertained, indeed, a profound and adoring passion for me, but reciprocated it not in the slightest degree. If ever there were a man capable of making an impression on my heart, it was Count Diego Christoval: but I experienced no tender feeling towards him. Even at the time I somewhat wondered at this, making it a subject of self-congratulation; and I thought mine was a heart altogether inaccessible to love—or else that I had never as yet encountered the individual who was to win my affections. Most women, when the term of girlhood is past, form in their own minds the *beau ideal* that they hope to encounter in the course of time, and whom they feel that they can love: but I never indulged in such a dream—I had never thought upon the subject—I had never felt the slightest want to love or to be loved. Therefore the Spanish bandit fulfilled no preconceived ideal on my part; nor did his handsome person, his elegant manners, or his witching conversation produce a tender impression upon me.

"We proceeded about twenty-five miles that day, and the journey terminated at a half-ruined tower, which stood concealed in the midst of a dense grove of cork-trees. It had been an immense wood; but hostile encounters between the Carlists and Christinos had taken place in that neighbourhood, and large quantities of the trees had been cut down to aid in throwing up defences and to be burnt as firewood. The land round about indicated the scene of battles,—being ploughed up in many directions by artillery and waggons. The blackened remnants of trees, half burnt, lay scattered about; and the horses' feet stumbled over cannonballs and pieces of broken weapons. The tower itself was situated half-way up an eminence, which was of so peculiar a form as to be inaccessible behind; and thus it served as a back-ground defence for the building. The cork-trees stretched up to within a few yards of the tower, which they well-nigh completely embowered in their verdure. There had been fighting at the tower: and the artillery had played upon the massive edifice, destroying at least half, but leaving the other portion comparatively uninjured.

"There was some furniture in the tower; but the place having been pillaged, everything of value had disappeared. Nevertheless, there were sufficient means of rendering several rooms comfortable enough; and here did the band take up its quarters. One apartment served as a general room where the meals were taken in common, the same as at the encampment; and the others served as bed-chambers. Of these, the best within the tower was allowed to me. On our arrival I was both surprised and apprehensive at finding such pains taken to render the place habitable: for it struck me that so much trouble would scarcely be incurred, if it were intended to pursue the journey on the following day, or even within two or three days. And two or three days did pass without any intimation being given that we were to resume our march towards the Pyrenees. I did not choose to manifest any immediate impatience, because I felt that I had no right to make my own particular objects predominate over the views and interests of Don Diego Christoval and his band. I therefore maintained an outward appearance of cheerfulness, although I began to entertain some misgiving in respect to my position there. In short, I feared that the bandit-chief was doing his best to keep me as long as he possibly could, and that I was virtually a prisoner. For when Christoval and his men went out on their predatory excursions, two of them invariably remained at the tower, ostensibly to act as a guard for the women, but I could not help fancying in reality to prevent my escape. Moreover, when I walked out, one of the women—Isabella generally—accompanied me, and one of the sentinels followed at a distance with the pretext of watching over us. But this had not been done when at the encampment: and I asked myself wherefore such precautions should be held necessary now?

"A week had passed since our arrival at the tower; and there was no sign of a removal. I now purposely sought an opportunity of speaking to the Count. He appeared to understand my wishes; and one day, returning home from the usual excursion much earlier than was his wont, he asked me to accompany him in a walk. It was now the close of October; and the weather was cold. We passed into the wood; and Don Diego speedily approached the subject which I was desirous of reaching. He said, 'I know what is passing in your mind, Senora; you are impatient to leave us—to leave *me*,' he added emphatically; 'and you think I am not behaving honourably or kindly towards you? Now, will you hear me? You are the first woman I ever loved in my life; and you will be the last. The sentiment with which you have smitten me, is a deathless one. Not merely my happiness, but my very life, is in your hands: for if you were to leave me, I could not possibly survive your loss. This love of mine has rendered me desperate—so desperate indeed, that it is making me act with duplicity and unkindness towards you. What is to be my fate? It is in your hands."

"It is impossible to be angry or indignant with that man: he spoke in language so fervid, and yet so replete with delicate respect—his looks were filled with so much admiration mingled with so much despair—there was altogether such a blending of sincerity, and pathos, and manly appeal in his air, his words, and his manner, that I experienced for him a boundless compassion. Knowing that he possessed a generous heart, and certain lofty sentiments of honour, in spite of the lawless kind of life he was leading, I thought to touch and to move him by representing my assumed position as a real and veritable one. I accordingly addressed him in terms of impressive seriousness. I told him that I was a married woman, and was separated from my husband in consequence of the incompatibility of our dispositions; but that inasmuch as I could not on the one hand contract another alliance, I was equally resolute on the other never to lose sight of my honour and good name. The Count looked much distressed, and reflected profoundly. At length he asked if it were impossible I could never love him? I told him that while I felt deeply grateful for all the kindness I had experienced at his hands—and that although I should ever entertain a friendly remembrance of him—yet that my heart was incapable of experiencing a more tender sentiment. 'To part from you,' he said in a mournful voice, 'will be the same as laying violent hands upon myself: it will be an act of suicide—and I have not the courage to accomplish it. I beseech you to remain at the tower a short time longer. I will not insult myself so far as to assure you that I am incapable of any outrage towards you. If you would consent to live all your life with me as a sister, I should be happy. Mine is no gross and sensual passion: it is pure and ethereal: it is the strangest and most romantic love that ever yet filled the heart of man. So long as I can enjoy the light of your presence—so long as I can hear the music of your voice playing in my ears—so long as I am permitted to gaze upon you from time to time, and dwell upon the beauty of your countenance—therein shall all my ideas of earthly happiness be concentrated. Surely, Senora, such a love as this is not to be lightly repudiated? Surely you will take some compassion upon the man who proffers you such a love?"

"I answered that I would speak to him as if it were a sister addressing a brother; and I went on to represent that for his own sake the sooner we parted the better—that his infatuation would only become the greater, his love the more intimately interwoven with his entire being—that the hour for parting must come at last, sooner or later—and that the longer it was postponed, the more deeply would it be felt by him when it did come. He replied that he was aware of all this—that he had reasoned with himself a thousand times upon the subject during the few past weeks—but that he had not the courage to let me depart. He terminated by conjuring that I would remain one month longer—only one month: that if I consented, he would act precisely in accordance with my wishes—that he would never obtrude himself on my presence, save when I chose to receive him—that he would not ask me to walk with him, unless I myself first signified my willingness—and to be brief, he used so many impassioned arguments and vehement entreaties, that I knew not how to refuse. The thought struck me, too, that if I did refuse, the madness of his passion was such that he might be rendered desperate, and my position would be made far worse; and the idea simultaneously occurred to me that my best course would be to throw him off his guard so that I might escape. I therefore consented to remain another month at the tower. But I informed him that it was absolutely necessary I should communicate with my brother in England, who would be uneasy at my long silence. He said that if I would write to him, addressing my letter from the French town of Perpignan, in the Pyrenees, one of his men should proceed thither and post the letter; and that if my brother wrote back to me to the post-office in that same town, he would send again at the expiration of ten days to fetch the letter for me. I gratefully accepted this proposal, and wrote to Frank at Southampton, desiring him to write back to me at Perpignan. I said nothing of my disagreeable adventure at Barcelona—nor of the strange company with whom I had been living for six weeks past: but I led him to believe that I was in a situation as governess in an English family. At the same time I wrote a letter to Mrs. Knight at Barcelona, explaining wherefore I had fled so precipitately, and telling her how the whole affair was a base conspiracy on the part of her wicked son to ruin me, in revenge because I had rejected his dishonourable overtures. This letter I sealed and enclosed it in the one to Frank, desiring him to post it at Southampton, and alleging some excuse for wishing such a thing done. When my packet was in readiness, I gave it to the Count: and he at once despatched a messenger with it to Perpignan. At the expiration of ten days I duly received Frank's answer from the school at Southampton, and therefore acquired the assurance that my own packet had been duly posted.

"I may here add that as my own garments were now wearing out, the messenger who had been sent to Perpignan, brought back with him a quantity of stuffs of various materials suited for dresses; and these were presented to me by Isabella. On the one hand I could not help being touched by this delicate consideration on the part of Christoval: but on the other hand, the circumstance made me apprehend that he by no means intended to part from me at the expiration of the month. I therefore watched anxiously for an opportunity of escape; but this I feared I should not very readily find—for the entrance of the tower was guarded day and night by two sentinels, the men taking their turns: while from my own chamber-window there was no possibility of flight, as it was too narrow for me to pass myself through it. To be brief, the month passed; and at the expiration of that time, Don Diego sought a private interview with me. His manner was as tender and as respectful as ever: but there was more firmness in his words and in his looks. He gave me to understand that he could not make up his mind to part with me—that I was dearer to him than life itself—that I need fear nothing at his hands, as he was perfectly contented to live on the same terms as at present—but that tyrannical, harsh, and unjustifiable though his conduct might be in retaining me a prisoner, he could not help doing so. I now remonstrated with him seriously, and for a moment angrily: but I saw that he was resolved—and from something which he let drop, it became evident enough that he hoped by persevering in his delicate attentions and tender assiduities, to make a favourable impression in the course of time upon me. I made him comprehend that this hope would be cruelly disappointed—and that if he persisted in retaining me captive at the tower, his conduct would efface all the generous and hospitable treatment I had experienced at his hands. He was deeply moved by what I said: and yet he relented not in his resolve to keep me a prisoner there.

"I must now pass over a period of about eight months and bring my narrative down to the month of June, 1840. During these eight months I remained at the tower. Every month was I permitted to write to Frank, the letter being posted to Perpignan; and as regularly was his answer brought thence for me. I continued to receive the utmost attention, kindness, and delicate treatment from Christoval, his men, and the women: my liberty was alone refused me. It is scarcely possible to comprehend the strange romantic passion of that man. He never forgot himself in my presence—never uttered a word to give me offence—never bent upon me a look which threatened me with insult. He never so much as took my hand, much less offered to carry it to his lips. He studied to the utmost of his power, apart from keeping me prisoner, to testify the devotedness of his passion. Often and often did I remonstrate, entreat, threaten, display indignation, and have recourse to prayers, all in their turn: but in vain! I have seen that man weep the bitterest tears when I have thus addressed him: I have seen him sob like a child as I have thrown myself at his feet and besought him to let me depart: but yet he had the courage and firmness to conquer his emotions sufficiently to make him refuse my prayer. And he too has thrown himself at my feet, but without so much as laying a finger upon my garments; he has besought and implored that I would lend a favourable ear to his tale of love, and consent to let a priest join our hands in marriage. When I renewed my representation that I was already married, he showed by his look that he could scarcely believe me: and yet he never said so in words. His appearance changed—he grew careworn—and though he relaxed not from those pursuits which belonged to his lawless life, yet in other respects he lost all energy, and roved about the personification of despondency and despair. I could not help pitying him: but I could not love him. Never, perhaps, in this world did man testify so wild, so romantic, so devoted, and enthusiastic love, without inspiring a reciprocal feeling. But he did not. I repeat that I pitied him, even when most angry at this outrageous prisonage which I endured; but, no—I could not love him.

"And during that interval of eight months, I had not the slightest opportunity of making even an attempt at escape. It is true that when out walking with Isabella, and followed at a short distance by one of the band, I might have suddenly darted off: but could I hope that my limbs would prove swifter than those of the alert and athletic Catalan bandit? and I was resolved not to suffer the mortification of making any ineffectual endeavour to emancipate myself. I must frankly confess that at last I got so accustomed to this strange mode of life, that it became far less irksome to me than might have been supposed. Indeed, I had few inducements to make me wish to return to the great world again—that world in which I had already experienced some misfortunes. But still I longed—Oh! most fervently longed to embrace my beloved brother; and I was also fearful that should the Christino soldiers ever take the tower by surprise, there might be a general fusilade of all its inmates, men and women without discrimination—and my unfortunate self amongst them. For I knew full well that the most atrocious barbarities were committed by the Spanish soldiers, no mercy even being shown to females or innocent children. That Don Diego Christoval himself full well suspected my hope and idea of escaping, there cannot be the slightest doubt: and hence the precautions which he took to anticipate any endeavour of that kind on my part. Nevertheless, I was not made positively to feel that I was a prisoner: it was a sort of honourable captivity in which I was kept. For instance, the door of my chamber was never bolted outside at night: but then, although I was thus at liberty to quit my room if I chose, I could not have issued forth from the tower, as there were two sentinels ever posted at the entrance-door.

"One day, after the return of the Count and his band from a marauding expedition, they brought the intelligence, which they had gleaned at some distant village, that the Captain-General of Catalonia had marched forth from Barcelona at the head of a considerable body of troops, with the intention of scouring the Catalan hills and annihilating the guerilla and bandit hordes which infested those districts. It was likewise understood that the military commandant intended to divide his troops into five or six flying columns, with a view to carry on his operations in various parts of the principality at the same time. It was therefore a serious danger which now appeared to be imminent. I sought an opportunity of speaking alone with Christoval, and represented to him that if he really entertained towards me the devoted passion which he had professed, it was cruel to a degree to expose me to the chance of falling into the hands of the Captain-General's troops. He bade me fear not: for that an incessant look-out would be kept, and on the first appearance of one of the flying columns in that immediate neighbourhood, it was his intention to remove with his band into the wild fastnesses of the Pyrenees, where they could remain until the present danger should be over. At the same time Don Diego assured me that if the peril became more serious than he could at that moment anticipate, he would at once send me under safe and honourable escort into France. He availed himself of that opportunity to fall upon his knees again in my presence, vowing that if I would consent to become his companion for the rest of our lives, he would at once take leave of his associates and fly away with me into another country. But still did I persevere in my refusal: for I was prepared to encounter all risks and meet all dangers, rather than surrender myself up to one whom I did not love.

"For several days Don Diego himself disguised in various garbs, penetrated to a distance to learn tidings relative to the movement of the Captain-General's troops; and one evening, on his return to the tower, he brought intelligence of such importance that a council of the whole band was immediately called. In these deliberations the women were accustomed to be present; and on this occasion I was amongst them. I had already picked up the Spanish language with the utmost facility, though I could not converse in it with the same fluency and accuracy as I could in the French tongue. I nevertheless understood all that was said in my presence. It appeared from what Don Diego reported, that one of the flying columns was at a distance of about ten miles from the tower, and that it was commanded by a brigadier-general, to whom the son of the Captain-General was attached as aide-de-camp. It further appeared that the officers had fixed their quarters at a little farm-house, the occupants of which experienced a devoted friendship for Don Diego Christoval. At the council which sat to deliberate upon these particulars, a bold and daring project was started by Christoval himself. This was nothing less than to make a midnight attack upon the farm-house, carry off the son of the Captain-General, and hold him as a hostage for the safety of the band. Nay, more—it was even calculated that an immense ransom might be obtained for his restoration. This proposal was received with enthusiastic acclaim by the members of the band; and the women themselves welcomed it with delight. It would have been a project of sheer madness, were it not for the friendly disposition of the occupants of the farm: but under those circumstances it was one which presented every chance of being successfully carried out. Accordingly, a little before midnight, Christoval and ten of his followers,—two remaining behind as sentinels,—set out upon their expedition. During their absence I remained with the Catalan women in the common room of the tower: for I naturally felt anxious as to the result, and could not possibly retire to rest. I feared that in case of failure, a pursuit might be instituted by the troops; and their arrival at the tower might promptly follow. Besides, although not entertaining the slightest affection for Don Diego—and indeed having much reason to be displeased with him—there was nevertheless a certain friendly feeling which I experienced towards him, at all events sufficient to render me anxious for his safety. The Catalan women chatted cheerfully and merrily: they appeared to be confident that the enterprise would be crowned with success. And they were right. For between two and three o'clock in the morning, Christoval and his men returned with the Captain-General's son as their prisoner. He was a young man of about five-and-twenty, of middle height—slender, and well made. His countenance was not handsome, but might be termed prepossessing, and was invested with an air of mingled heroism and intelligence. He bore himself with a dignified hauteur, and was by no means cast down by the position in which he was placed. I should add, for the better understanding of what is to follow, that he was dressed in a blue frock coat, fitting tight to his person and buttoned up to the throat—plain dark trousers—and the usual Spanish shako. It appeared from what I subsequenly learnt, that the capture of this young officer had been effected all in a moment, with the utmost ease, and without a shot being fired or a blow struck. From information secretly given to Don Diego by the farmer himself, the aide-de-camp, being on duty all that night, was frequently passing between the farm-house and outposts of the column, which were at a little distance, at suitable place for the bivouac;—and totally unsuspicious that such a daring attempt would be made, the officer passed to and fro between the two points, alone and unattended, and smoking his cigar. Christoval and his band lay in ambush at a convenient spot sufficiently removed from the scene of danger; and watching their opportunity, they pounced upon the aide-de-camp, overpowered and gagged him in a moment, and hurried him away. When sufficiently distant from the troops, the gag was removed from his lips, and he was assured of honourable treatment if he attempted no resistance—which indeed he was not in a condition to offer. Under such circumstances was it that the enterprise had succeeded; and he was brought a captive to the tower.

"On the following day he was compelled by Christoval to write a letter to the brigadier commanding the column, stating that he was captive in the hands of a guerilla-party of Carlists—that the conditions of his release were immunity for themselves and the payment of a certain ransom money—that he requested the column might not advance farther in a northerly direction pending the negotiations for his release—as if it did, his life would be sacrificed—that he was unable to specify the place where he was retained captive—and he concluded by desiring that the bearer of his letter should be treated with a consideration due to the sanctity of a herald under such circumstances.

"With this document Don Diego Christoval himself set off to the farm-house, the quarters of the brigadier commanding the column. During his absence, the young officer remained a close prisoner at the tower. He sat smoking in what I have before described as the common-room; and unbending towards the woman, he chatted frankly and gaily with them. I was there for a portion of the time; and the officer, finding me to be an English woman, was naturally surprised at my presence with that lawless band. Isabella, for the kind purpose of screening me in case of any subsequent disaster, told him that I was a prisoner as well as himself; and this was the first time that the fact had ever been positively proclaimed in words. But it was now mentioned to serve, and not to annoy: and instead of being angry or hurt, I felt grateful and pleased. The officer paid me much attention, mingled with the most courteous respect. I found him to be a generous-hearted, intelligent young man; and as he spoke French perfectly, I was enabled to converse with him. At the expiration of a few hours, Christoval returned. He announced that the brigadier had undertaken not to push his column any farther in a northerly direction; but that he himself was unable to conclude the negotiation for the prisoner's release, until he should have communicated with the Captain-General, the young man's father; and as it was not precisely known in what part of the country he might be at the time, and couriers would have to seek him, it had been arranged that Don Diego Christoval should return to the farm-house, the brigadier's headquarters, at the expiration of a week. Meanwhile it was understood that the Captain-General's son should be treated with all possible respect and attention. Accordingly, having communicated these results of his interview with the brigadier, Don Diego intimated to the officer that he would pledge his word of honour not to escape, he might consider himself free to walk about, alone and at all hours, within one mile of the tower. This *parole* was promptly given; and the young officer now remained only in what might be termed an honourable captivity. Thus several days passed, during which the prisoner paid increased attention to me—or rather endeavoured to do so: but I suffered him to perceive that his assiduities were not acceptable. Indeed, I was most careful not to provoke Christoval's jealousy, apprehensive lest in a fit of desperation he might be led to adopt summary and violent measures to make me his own. Besides, the Spanish officer inspired me with no more tender interest than the Count himself had done; and as I always despised a mere frivolous coquetry, I had not the least inclination to divert myself in that respect at the prisoner's expense.

"I must now proceed to observe that after the first day's prisonage, he grew restless, and roved about in the vicinage of the tower, almost constantly smoking. I was told, too, that instead of going to bed when the others retired, he issued forth with his cigar in his mouth, and rambled in the wood till a late hour. He was suffered to do exactly as he chose, the utmost faith being reposed in his *parole*—a pledge which a Spanish officer was very seldom known to break, and the breath of which would dishonour him for ever, even in the opinion of his own most intimate friends. Six days had passed; and on the ensuing one, Christoval was to return to the brigadier. On the sixth night I did not hear the young officer go forth as usual between ten and eleven o'clock, to smoke his cigar in the wood. I lay awake, listening: for an idea had sprung up in my mind—and the longer I thought of it, the more consistent and feasible did it become. An hour passed—and all remained silent. I rose from my bed—hurried on a few articles of clothing—stole noiselessly out of my chamber—and listened at the door of the one occupied by the officer. I could hear the regular respiration of one who sleeps. Cautiously did I open his door—and again I listened. Yes—he slept. A candle was burning in the room. I stole in—he was in bed, and slumbering profoundly. I hastened to possess myself of his clothes; and perceiving a quantity of cigars scattered about on the table, took one of them. I was in mortal terror lest he should awake: but he did not—and I regained my own room safely and unobserved. Now for a bold enterprise! I hastened to apparel myself in the male costume I had thus self-appropriated;—frockcoat, trousers, boots and shako—I had taken them all; and I clothed myself therewith. Then, lighting the cigar and putting it in my mouth, I descended the stairs. The door of the common-room was open—and the powerful moonlight streaming through the narrow window, fell upon a bright object that lay on the table. It was a pistol—and I lost no time in securing it about my person. Again I listened; all was quite. Oh! how my heart palpitated as I opened the door of the tower. It was a fine night in the month of June: but the shade of the embowering cork-trees intercepted the effulgence of moon and stars. The two sentinels were smoking their pipes and conversing together within half-a dozen yards of the gate. I passed out, imitating as well as I could the gait and bearing of the Spanish officer, and smoking my cigar in the most approved style. It was a moment of acute suspense: but when I found that the sentinels moved not, and that I was proceeding onward without the slightest molestation, the enthusiasm of an indescribable joy flamed up within me. It was the intoxication of triumph. But still I did not lose my presence of mind for a single moment; I did not hurry my pace until perfectly assured that I was beyond eye-shot of the sentinels. When once, however, deep in the shade of the grove, I tossed away the cigar, which had well-nigh made me sick and left the most nauseating sensation behind. Then I did speed onward with all possible swiftness. Knowing, from all that had been said in my presence, in which direction the brigadier's column lay, I took precisely the opposite one: for I was fearful if I fell into the hands of the troops, I might be sent to Barcelona on account of the jewel-business. After making a slight circuit, so as to get clear of the eminence on the slope of which the tower stood, I took a northerly direction for the purpose of pushing my way towards the French frontier. As I caught the last glimpse of the old building whose summit appeared just above the trees, I thought to myself how boundless would be the rage and despair of Count Christoval when my flight should be discovered. But I was rejoiced at having effected my escape; and with as much speed as on the memorable night when I fled from Barcelona, did I pursue my way.

" I had with me a little money—just the same sum in fact which I possessed when flying from the above mentioned city; and I was resolved to obtain a change of apparel as soon as possible. I need hardly observe that I had not dared bring with me my own female raiment: for there were no means of concealing it under the tight-fitting uniform, and it would have been ruinous to my enterprise to come forth from the tower with a bundle. The enjoyment of liberty seemed to nerve me against fatigue, and gave a vigorous elasticity to my footsteps. I proceeded onward for hours, only resting at long intervals, and then but for a few minutes at a time. The morning dawned—the sun rose—and still I proceeded onward, through a wild and mountainous country without a single habitation. The Pyrenees were already in view—and I began to look about in every direction for a cottage, farm-house—or some dwelling, in short, where I might obtain refreshment and a change of raiment. All of a sudden I came upon the high road, and there the following spectacle met my view.

"In the middle of that highway, a post-chaise lay overturned; and a gentleman was leaning in a disconsolate manner, and with his arms folded, against it. One horse, whose traces had evidently been cut away, was browsing on the grass by the road-side: the other horse and the postilion were not to be seen. That gentleman was the only person visible upon the spot. From the point where this spectacle broke upon my sight, I was not immediately perceived by that gentleman: for I had stopped short amidst a knot of trees to contemplate the scene. At first I could not discern his countenance; but in a few moments—as he raised his eyes and looked with evident anxiety along the road—to my astonishment I at once recognised my treacherous enemy James Knight. Ah! and he was alone there—and I could upbraid him for his villanous conduct towards me. But of what use were upbraidings? Could I not turn the circumstance to my own advantage and punish him by a humiliating process at the same time? No sooner was the design conceived, than I resolved to execute it. Drawing forth my pistol, without knowing whether it was loaded or not; I suddenly appeared before the amazed and startled young man. He at once recognized me; and being a coward as well as a treacherous villain, fancied that I was about to immolate him to my vengeance. He fell upon his knees, beseeching me to spare him. While he remained in that humiliating posture, I bade him explain to me as briefly as possible the meaning of the circumstances in which I found him placed.

"He told me that the nature of his mother's affairs at Barcelona had rendered it needful to obtain certain documents from England; and that he had accordingly been despatched off posthaste upon the mission. About a quarter of an hour before I had arrived upon that spot, a party of robbers had sprung forth from amidst the adjacent trees. The horses had taken fright, rushed up the bank, and upset the chaise. The robbers had carried off his portmanteau, his purse, and whatsoever valuables he had about his person—and had decamped with their booty. The chaise was broken: and the postilion had ridden back on one of the horses to the nearest posting-house, which was about four miles distant, in order to obtain another chaise, or else succour to repair the overturned one. Such was James Knight's recital, the truth of which appeared to be fully corroborated by circumstances. I bade him rise from his knees and give me his coat and hat in exchange for my military frock and shako. This he did, all the while beseeching and imploring in the most piteous terms that I would spare his life. I taunted him with his villany towards me, telling him that I would not degrade myself by wreaking my vengeance on so miserable a wretch. Having assumed his hat and coat—the latter a frock buttoning up to the neck and fitting me perfectly—told him he might inform the postilion that the remaining horse would be found some short distance farther along the road; and leaping upon its back, I made the animal gallop away at the utmost speed of which it was capable. Having proceeded thus for about three miles, I came in sight of a little hamlet; and dismounting, tied the horse to a tree. I then continued my way on foot; and on reaching the hamlet, obtained refreshment. The cottagers, at whose dwelling I stopped were naturally surprised to behold a female in male attire; but as I gave them a piece of silver as a renumeration for the sorry fare which was served up to me, they asked no questions. I did not tarry many minutes in that hamlet, but pursuing my way on foot, speedily entered upon the vast amphitheatrical chain of the Pyrenees.

"The ascent of the Pyrenees from the Spanish side, is steep, difficult, and dangerous. Sometimes, when having mounted a terrace or ledge of rock, perhaps a mile in length, the traveller finds his way suddenly barred by the towering wall of a still higher eminence, up which he may perhaps climb if he be of desperate boldness and of experience in the mode of scaling these rocky ramparts: but I dared not make such attempts I therefore frequently had to turn back and take another course,—sometimes when advancing too quickly, nearly falling over the edge of a gulf on which I suddenly stopped short,—at other times terrified by a rush amongst the stunted trees of brushwood, with the idea that it was a wolf preparing to spring at me. Nevertheless, I pressed onward with a courage and an ardour that surprised myself, and with an exhilaration of spirits that was sustained by the excitement of my travel. During all that day, I did not succeed in advancing more than eight miles into the heart of the Pyrenees, in consequence, of the many times I had to turn and retrace my steps, and of the circuitous paths that I had to pursue. As evening drew near, I felt excessively weary; and was rejoiced when I came in sight of a pleasing valley, on the slope of which stood a little cottage with a number of sheep grazing near. There I was welcomed by the shepherd and his wife—an elderly couple of hospitable disposition, and who asked no impertinent questions. I slept well that night; and on the following morning, resumed my travels. During this second day I passed through several picturesque valleys, reminding me of what I had read of Alpine scenery: for high above them towered the enormous peaks of the mountains, some covered with snow. There were glaciers upon those heights; and I learnt that avalanches were by no means unknown. I fell in with many shepherds tending countless flocks; and when I sought refreshment, it was readily afforded—a trifling remuneration, which was all that I could give, being gratefully accepted. At the end of my second day's journey, I had altogether accomplished thirty miles, including the distance performed on the first day, and was now within fifteen miles of the nearest village in the French territory. It was about sunset on the third day that I reached this village and there my passport was demanded, by a *gendarme* as I was about to enter a little inn. I showed it—for I had it with me; and then in reply to the officer's questions, I related sufficient of my past adventures to account for appearing in male attire, omitting however the circumstances of having made any exchange of garments with Mr. Knight. In short, I gave the *gendarme* to understand that these were the clothes in which I had escaped from the brigand's tower. The mayor of the village—a substantial farmer whose dwelling was upon the outskirts—heard my tale from the lips of the *gendarme*; and when I rose on the following morning, the landlady of the inn told me that the mayor desired to see me. I accordingly proceeded to his house, where he, his wife, and a grown-up family of sons and daughters, received me in the kindest manner. They invited me to remain a few days with them, and repose myself after the fatigues I had endured. This invitation I thankfully accepted; and I stayed with this amiable family for a week. I need hardly say that suitable female apparel was provided for me; but I may add that it was with some degree of regret I put off my male clothing—for I had grown accustomed to it, and preferred it to that which more properly became my sex. At the expiration of a week the farmer's wife, finding that I was anxious to depart, took me up to her own chamber to have a little conversation with me. She said that herself, her husband, and everybody indeed at the farmhouse, had conceived such a liking for me that they could not bear the idea of my leaving except under circumstances of comfort. She said she had therefore prepared a box of apparel and various necessaries for my use; and likewise begged me to accept the loan of a sufficient sum of money to take me to the place of my destination, wheresoever it might be. While gratefully expressing my thanks for all this kindness, I declared my wish to return without delay to England; and the farmer's wife insisted upon my acceptance of five hundred francs—or twenty pounds—for my travelling expenses. With the assurance that I should never forget so much generosity, I took my leave of the kind lady, her sons and her daughters. The old man drove me over in his chaise-cart to the nearest town, whence I could obtain a conveyance for Paris. I was resolved to go to England by way of Calais, as I did not think fit to pass through Havre, for fear that Mrs. Knight or her son James should have made the friends whom they had in that town acquainted with the circumstances at Barcelona—or rather with a version of them most prejudicial to myself. I arrived without any accident, or adventure worth relating, at Calais; and thence I passed to Dover. Though anxious to proceed without delay to Southampton, in order to embrace my brother, yet having travelled almost day and night for the best part of a week in my journey from the extreme south of France to Dover, I was compelled to remain here a day or two to repose myself. I proceeded to the *Admiral's Head*, which was kept by Mr. Marshall, with whose eldest daughter I was at school at Southampton. Kate Marshall was delighted to see me; and when she introduced me to her parents and sisters as the school-fellow of whom she had so often spoken, I was received with a most cordial welcome—not in the light of a guest to whom a bill was to be sent in but as a friend and visitress. Kate Marshall was now eighteen years of age, and a very fine young woman. Her two sisters were likewise exceedingly handsome. They were moreover all three kind-hearted and generous-minded creatures, and strove to make me as happy and comfortable as possible. Kate, regarding me in the light of an old friend—a bosom-friend too, in whom she could place the utmost confidence—did not hesitate to admit me to the knowledge of a certain secret connected with her father's prosperity. She took me up into a little private chamber of her own, situated quite at the top of the house, and elegantly furnished. Here she showed me a singular contrivance for carrying on a correspondence with parties elsewhere, by means of a beautiful breed of carrier-pigeons which she possessed. I need not enter into minute particulars now. Suffice it to say that there was a little trap-door in the ceiling of this chamber, by which the feathered emissaries were enabled to enter that room of their own accord on their arrival from a journey. All the neighbours knew that Kate Marshall possessed this beautiful breed of pigeons: but none were aware of the purposes which they served. Kate however—as I above hinted—was inclined to be communicative with me; and she gave me some particulars respecting the uses of those pigeons.

"In appeared that Mr. Marshall had in an earlier part of his life been a sailor on board a privateer-vessel which his father had commanded; and in a conflict with a French cruiser, he and two or three others of the sailors were taken prisoners. His father (Kate's grandfather) managed however to escape with the privateer. Robert Marshall and his companions were taken to Calais, where they were held prisoners. While in Calais gaol, Robert Marshall fell in with a Frenchman who was a captive there for some offence against the laws of his own country, and who possessed an extraordinary breed of carrier-pigeons. The Frenchman was needy, and Robert Marshall had a sum of money secured about his person, which had escaped the notice of his captors. With a portion of these funds he bought some of the pigeons: thence an intimacy sprang up between him and the Frenchman—and in the course of conversation, they came to an understanding how a most valuable correspondence could be carried on (when the peace should be established) between Dover and Calais for the furtherence of the contraband trade. The matter, once broached, was promptly arranged between them. Soon afterwards the Frenchman obtained his liberty; and he assisted Robert Marshall to escape from Calais gaol. To be brief, Robert Marshall managed to get back to Dover with his valuable carrier-piegons. At that time old Marshall (Robert's father) occupied a house in the neighbourhood of Dover; and there the headquarters of the carrier-pigeons were established. When the Peace of 1815 took place, old Marshall bought the *Admiral's Head* with the monies he had made by privateering; and thither were the head-quarters of the birds transferred. Between Dover and Calais—that is to say between the Marshalls and the Frenchman—a frequent correspondence was kept up; and by means of this prompt interchange of intelligence, tidings were mutually conveyed enabling them to baffle the revenue officers on either side of the channel in their contraband ventures. Old Marshall died—Robert Marshall succeeded to the *Admiral's Head*—and for years did he and his wife manage the breed of birds, the correspondence with the Frenchman, and the smuggling trade. Thus did they grow rich. The Frenchman died; and his son succeeded to the father's possession and avocations. But of late years there was little correspondence kept up between the parties at Dover and those at Calais, both being too well off to run any risks, save when an opportunity presented itself for some very large gains. The Frenchman however, being an intelligent and enterprising man, saw how this rapid method of communication might be made the means of conveying news which should enable persons in London and Paris to take advantage of particular prices of the Funds or incidents of the Stock Exchange, and by judicious speculation make considerable gains. Robert Marshall, Kate's father, knew nothing of stock-jobbing and dabbling on the Exchange; and he therefore could not remove to London for that purpose. The Frenchman however found an agent in the British capital; and to his house, situated on the bank of the Thames, near London Bridge, several of the birds were accordingly removed, Marshall undertaking for a certain annual sum, regularly paid, to let the *Admiral's Head* continue as a resting-place or station for the feathered messengers. Other stations were established at Boughton and Gravesend, between London and Dover; while on the other side of the channel, the Frenchman made arrangements for the requisite number of stations between Calais and Paris. Thus for some years was the correspondence carried on between the financier in London and the Frenchman in Paris; and no doubt large sums of money were made from the intelligence which they were enabled so promptly to exchange, and which was thereby communicated in as many hours as it would otherwise have taken days to forward by the ordinary channels. When Kate Marshall left the school at Southampton two years previously to the time at which I thus saw her at Dover, she took charge of the little chamber at the top of the house, and which was fitted up with the arrangements to serve as a resting-place for the carrier-pigeons between London and Paris. Several of the birds were still kept at the *Admiral's Head*; and Kate took great pleasure in cultivating the breed.

"Such was the narrative that my friend Miss Marshall told me in the frank confidence of the sincere friendship which she experienced for me. Confidence begets confidence; and in return I gave her some particulars of the extraordinary adventures which had occurred to myself since we parted two years back at Southampton. I did not however mention any names—I mean in respect to my extraordinary marriage; and thus I suppressed those of the Marstons, Mrs. Lloyd, and the Marquis of Villebelle. I did however tell her frankly the incident of the jewel business at Barcelona, and how it led me to fly to the Catalan hills and fall into the hands of Don Diego Christoval. She laughed when I assured her that I did not really take the jewels; and I was some time before I could make her believe in my innocence. It was only when I grew angry at her scepticism that she ceased from her good-natured bantering upon the subject; but she added that if I had really taken those valuables, she should not have thought a bit the worse of me: adding that 'people must take care of themselves in this world.' I therefore saw that my friend's principles upon this subject were far from being the most correct; and I have no doubt that having been accustomed to look back so constantly on her grandfather's privateering career and her father's smuggling transactions, her notions of propriety and rectitude had in certain cases been considerably damaged and warped. From the description I gave her of Count Christoval she admired him most rapturously, and vowed that she wished she had possessed such a chance of becoming the handsome Catalan bandit's bride. I must however do her the justice to declare that so far as female purity went, her conduct and that of her sisters was unimpeachable.

"I remained two whole days with the friendly Marshalls; and when I took my leave, it was with a promise that I would soon visit them again. Kate inquired into the condition of my funds, and offered me assistance from her purse: but I still possessed sufficient for my present requirements, and therefore refused her generous offer. From Dover I proceeded to Southampton, and made the best of my way to the school, with a heart yearning to fold my brother in a loving embrace. On arriving at the well-known establishment, I was at once admitted by Mr. Jennings himself, who had seen me pass by the window of the parlour where he was sitting. On beholding me, his countenance grew exceedingly mournful; and I apprehended that something had happened to poor Frank. He took me into his parlour; and there he bade me prepare myself for some afflicting intelligence. Heavens! what a shock did I now receive,—I who had come thither in the fervid hope of clasping my brother in my arms. Alas, I was informed that Frank was no more! For a few minutes I was overwhelmed with grief. Mr. Jennings sent for his wife; and with every appearance of the most genuine sincerity, did they administer consolation. I shed torrents of tears;

for it seemed to me that the only being whom I had to love upon the face of the earth, was snatched from me. When the violence of my grief had somewhat subsided, I sought for particulars,—observing that the event must have been sudden indeed, as it was only two months since I had received a letter from Frank. Mr. Jennings proceeded to inform me that a very few days after Frank had thus written to me, the gentleman (the nobleman he should have said) who originally put him at the school, came and took him away. Jennings went on to inform me that Frank had been declining for some months past—and that if he had not mentioned it in his letters, it must have been through unwillingness to cause me affliction. He added that about three weeks after my brother had left the school, the gentleman (still of course speaking of the nobleman) wrote to inform him that the poor youth was no more. I did not for a moment suspect the truth of this story—a story which was all the more abominable and wicked, inasmuch as at the very instant it was told me Frank was still an inmate of that very school, and therefore within a few yards of the spot where I sat, pale and weeping, a listener to the fictitious narrative of his death. I asked Mr. Jennings who the gentleman (or nobleman, as I felt convinced he must be) was; but he declared that he himself knew not,—adding with a mysterious look, that both myself and Frank had been placed at the school under circumstances of secrecy into which he himself had not dared attempt to penetrate. In short, he gave me to understand that the gentleman (or nobleman) who had taken Frank to the school, and had fetched him away again, had used a fictitious name—that this same fictitions name had been appended to the letter containing the account of Frank's death—and that he possessed no clue to the real name nor even to the abode of that gentleman (or nobleman). What could I do? what could I say? The mystery thus observed—or rather, which was represented to me as being observed—corresponded so well with all the past details of everything relating to my brother and myself, that it wore an air of sterling truth. Wretched and almost heart-broken, I took my departure from the establishment, and proceeded by coach to London. I was resolved to make some endeavour to penetrate the mysteries connected with the past.

"On my arrival in the metropolis, I took a cheap lodging, and put myself into mourning for that brother whom I believed to be no more. I then proceeded to take a view of this cottage, so endeared to me as the home of my infancy and girlhood. It was shut up, and falling into decay. How I longed to live in it and settle myself down within its walls; but I had not the means. I proceeded on foot with the endeavour to find my way to that village where Mrs. Burnaby had taken us in the hired vehicle, and where the handsome equipage had waited to convey us to the house situated in the beautiful park. But the roads had most probably changed their appearance during the eight years which had elapsed since then; and at all events my memory served me not in respect to any features of the scenery which might guide me in the right direction. There is a complete labyrinth of roads intersecting each other in all that neighbourhood; so that I grew bewildered, and was compelled to give up the search after having vainly prosecuted it for two or three days. My funds were by this time totally exhausted; and I scarcely knew what to do. I wrote to Kate Marshall—but with great reluctance—requesting a temporary loan from her; and the return of post brought me a bank-note for twenty pounds. Thus I was relieved of anxiety for the immediate means of subsistence: and resolving to lose no time, I endeavoured to procure another situation as a governess. I answered advertisements in the newspapers—called at the residences of the parties advertising—but being unable to give any reference as to past character, experienced a cold refusal everywhere. Then I inserted advertisements asking for such a situation, and frankly stating that for reasons which I would explain orally, I was unable to offer testimonials: but these appeals elicited not a single response. Meanwhile weeks were slipping on—my money was diminishing—and I was oppressed by serious apprehensions for the future. Besides, I had contracted two debts that lay heavy enough upon my mind: one to the mayor's wife in the Pyrenean village—the other to Kate Marshall; and though I was well aware that they would neither expect to be paid very promptly, and the latter not at all until I should be fully able, yet I did not like the idea of those debts. I thought of taking in work: but I never was a good hand with the needle. I however made application at different places for such work, with the resolution to do anything to earn an honest livelihood; but I experienced no success. In process of time my money disappeared: then I lived by making away with my articles of clothing—till at length I was reduced to such a condition that I was penniless, with long arrears of rent owing to a hard-hearted landlady, and without a single thing left to raise money upon.

"It was in the middle of winter, that one bleak horrible night, between nine and ten o'clock, I was turned out of my lodging. I had not a friend to whom I could go: I had not even a single acquaintance in London of whom I could ask the slightest favour. I wandered about all that wretched night. Be assured that I fell in the way of temptations by yielding to which I might at once have possessed gold. But no!—sooner than abandon myself to that hideous alternative, I was fully resolved to put an end to my existence. All the next day I roved through the streets of London, half mad with the torturing sense of my wretched position. Night came again—and I was still houseless, foodless, penniless. I had not eaten a morsel for many, many long hours: but yet I was not faint—I was desperate. A strange excitement was raging within me; and often and often did I catch myself dwelling upon Kate Marshall's words, when in a laughing bantering mood she had told me that she half-believed I really had taken Mrs. Knight's jewels, and that she should not think any the worse of me if I really had. Ah! why did the reminiscence of those words thus keep coming back to my mind? Was it that an evil spirit had been created at the time they were uttered, to lie in wait for me—haunt my footsteps unseen—mark when the moment of weakness and despair arrived—and then whispeir these words anew in my ear? Certain it is that what was at first a mere reminiscence, became an inspiration—and that what became an inspiration grew into a resolution. Yes—a resolution engendered by despair, and desperately taken! I felt that I hovered between two distinct chasms—one yawning on my right hand, one upon my left. I must either plunge into that abyss in which woman's honour is engulfed; or I must throw myself headlong into the other where honesty is swallowed up. There I stood, already a lost being, though no deed of crime was done as yet: but still a lost being, because a fatal and irresistible necessity was impelling me onward to precipitate myself headlong into one of those gulfs. Under this influence I hurried through the metropolis—and gained the outskirts on the northern side, because they were those in which my recent searches after the road to the unknown village had been directed, and therefore had made me familiar with that neighbourhood. It was in a lonely part, where there were but six or seven houses scattered about, that my first crime was committed. Two ladies, apparently mother and daughter, came forth from one of those houses,—passing upon the threshold to bid good night to a lady, evidently the mistress of that house, where they had no doubt been passing the evening. I heard the mistress of the house ask if she should send a servant to accompany them home: they laughed as they declined,—saying that as their own abode was but a hundred yards distant, they did not fear any danger for so short a walk. Yet it was in that brief intermediate space between the two dwellings, that they were stopped and plundered. Stopped too by one of their own sex! It was in the deep shade of some overhanging trees, so that my countenance could not possibly be discerned, that I confronted them and bade them deliver up their money, telling them that there were two men lurking on the opposite side of the way. The ladies, dreadfully frightened, gave me their purses, beseeching me not to let them be harmed. I assured them they should not sustain any injury if they forbore from crying out. Then I fled precipitately—took a circuitous route through some fields—and re-entered London.

"It was the middle of the night and the shops were closed. I could not purchase any food—I could not obtain a lodging at that hour; for I shrank from the idea of entering a public-house. I wandered about till morning, so bewildered and confused—so excited and agitated with the deed I had done, that methought it was all a dream. I could scarcely believe in my own identity; I could not persuade myself that it was really I who had committed that crime. I dared not feel in my pocket to clutch the purses, and thus convince myself that it was not a delusion. I did not therefore examine them till long after dawn. Then, stepping aside into a secluded street, I looked to discover the amount of my ill-gotton funds. There were altogether seven guineas in the two purses I took a lodging—I procured food—I redeemed some of my apparel from the pawnbroker's—and I remained in doors for several days afterwards, fearing to go out lest I should be taken into custody. Nevertheless, in my calmer moments, when reasoning with myself, I knew full well that I could not possibly have been seen by the two ladies in a manner clear enough to enable them to identify me, I lived frugally and sparingly,—not daring to think of the future, although by this very economy postponing to utmost of my power the necessity for a recurrence to the same desperate means. But that time came again. In another part of the outskirts of London I committed a similar deed ; and on this occasion likewise, the sufferers were two ladies hastening home from a party. The produce was double as much as on the former occasion ; and upon this I lived for many weeks. One day, about noon, I was passing along a retired street on my may to a tradesman's shop to purchase something, when an elderly gentleman walking in front of me, while pulling out his handkerchief drew forth his pocket-book at the same time. The next moment it was in my hands. The rapid glance which I flung around showed me that the circumstance was unpreceived by the few persons passing in that street. The pocket-book was concealed beneath my shawl ; and I walked firmly on. The old gentleman speedily missed it—felt in all his pockets —looked back in dismay—and accosting me, asked civilly whether I had happened to notice that he had just dropped anything ? I replied in the negative, and continued my way. Regaining my lodgings, I examined the contents of the pocket-book. Two hundred pounds in bank-notes, and all for small sums ! Thus circumstances filled me with exultation—an exultation indeed in which was absorbed all lingering sense of the criminality of the ways which I was pursuing. Alas ! that I should be compelled to say this !

"I hastened to change several of the notes at different tradesman's shops in the neighbourhood,—thus converting them into gold. The next day I saw an advertisement in the newspaper offering a reward for the restoration of the pocket-book and its contents : but there was no intimation that the numbers of the notes were known, and the magnitude of the reward convinced me that they were not. Feeling now securing in the possession of my treasure, I reflected what course I should pursue. I dearly longed to have a quiet little comfortable suburban residence of my own ; and I had now the means of obtaining one. I again bethought myself of the cottage where the earliest years of my life were passed : so I set off to look at it once more. A bill pasted against the front door, intimated that it was to let, and where intelligence could be obtained as to terms. I proceeded to the office of the house-agent whose address I thus learnt ; and having ready money to pay down as an advance of rent, I was accepted as a tenant. Then I proceeded to furnish it, but in an economical manner : for I had a great deal to do with this money. I remitted the tweny pounds, through a London banker, to the mayor of the Pyrenean village, accompanied by a letter of thanks for the kindness I had received at his hands and those of his family ; and when my house was fitted up and I had engaged a servant—this present one, Rosa—I set off to pay the Marshalls a visit at Dover. By them I was kindly welcomed. I returned Kate the money she had lent me ; and when we were alone together, she questioned me closely as to what I was doing —particularly how I came to be so well dressed and had such a command of funds ? I evaded her queries at first ; and she again fell into that humour of good-tempered bantering in which she is apt to indulge, at the same time hinting her suspicion that I had found some wealthy lover. Singular as it may seem—strangely idiosyncratic as it may appear—I preferred proclaiming myself what I really was, than resting under the suspicion of being what I was not : and I accordingly told Kate all I had suffered—my wretched wanderings without food or shelter through the streets of the metropolis —and the desperate measures into which I had been forced. She wept in sympathy for the miseries and privations I had gone through, and appeared to admire me rather than otherwise for the course I had chosen. To my annoyance, I found that she even told her parents and her sisters all that had happened; and they thought no more of it than she did—or at least they thought none the worse of me. I remained for about a fornight at Dover; and when I was about to make my departure, Kate offered me some of her beautiful pigeons,—observing that it would prove an amusement to attend to them, and that by some means or another they might even become useful. I told her that I did not possibly see how this latter portion of her remark could be realized: when she said, 'My dear Elizabeth, if you continue in your present career which I am sure you will—for you have taken a good leaf out of Don Diego's Christoval's book—you are certain sooner or later to get yourself into trouble, from which one of these winged messengers might possibly rescue you. For instance, if at any time you wished to prove that you were at Dover at a certain hour when others may swear you were in London, send off a billet containing the necessary particulars to me; and it can be managed.'—I accepted four of the pigeons, and brought them with me to this cottage, where I have them now.

"Some months passed, during which I lived comfortably and happily enough—but in a sort of reckless and desperate manner in respect to my thoughts for the future. The boundary between honesty and dishonesty was completely passed over; and I began to consider that it was my destiny to follow the career upon which I had entered. I found that my servant Rosa was a good-hearted woman, who had taken a very great liking to me: but she was evidently at a loss to understand the sources of my income, or who or what I was. I never had a soul to see me, either male or female; and my habits were such that she could not possibly suspect any impropriety on my part *as a woman*. It must indeed have appeared singular to her that I should live thus secluded, months passing without a single soul visiting the cottage. At length, as my funds grew low, I perceived the necessity of replenishing them: but I likewise saw how dangerous it was for a woman to prosecute the course on which I had entered. A female may be described so much more easily than one of the other sex; and moreover ladies might resist the predatory demands of a woman, when they would yield at once in terror to those of a man. Thus was it that a train of reflection one day led to the idea of assuming male apparel. But this could not be done without admitting Rosa into my confidence. Gently and gradually did I break to her the circumstances of my position,—so cautiously and warily indeed, that she was not shocked by any suddenness of disclosure. To be brief, I found that I had not done wrong to admit her as my confidante; and my design was soon carried out. Under pretence of requiring a masquerade garb, I procured a complete suit of male apparel from a tailor; and shortly after I fetched it away, I made my first experiment in that disguise. But upon this part of my history I will not dwell at unnecessary length. If I have launched into so many details in respect to my criminal career, it is only because when first entering on my history, I resolved to speak without reserve; and this very avowal of my iniquities constitutes no mean portion of the heavy punishment I deserve.

"Months passed away—and by those means to which I need not more particularly allude, I obtained sufficient to live upon. One day, when dressed in my female garb, I was passing through a street at the End, having some purchases to make; and I encountered Sir John Marston. He was startled and surprised at beholding me—looked confused—and seemed as if he would have given a great deal to avoid such an encounter. More than ever convinced by his manner that he had wronged me in some way which I could not well understand, I said to him that the time would come when he must answer to me for the past. Recovering his wonted effrontery, he declared that he had nothing to answer for: whereupon I assured him that I was far from satisfied with his conduct towards me, and would do my best to penetrate the meaning of it. He asked me how I was circumstanced?—but instead of giving a direct reply, I inquired how it was possible I could be otherwise than poor, inasmuch as I had no doubt been defrauded out of money that was due to me. At this he affected to be very indignant,—reminding me of the five thousand pounds I had received, and which he said ought to have served as the fund of an income for my whole life. I then explained how I had been robbed of it within a few days after receiving the amount from him; and I insisted that he should do more for me, unless he wished me to give publicity to the whole affair of the mysterious marriage with the Marquis of Villebelle. Thereupon he replied that he was not at all influenced by my threats—but that out of compassion, he would allow me an income sufficient to keep me from want. But seeing me well dressed, he asked how I had been living? I at once boldly informed him that I held the situation of governess in a wealthy family—but that the duties thereof were most irksome, and that I had long thought of writing to him through his lawyer to demand an account of those monies which I felt convinced he must have deprived me of. After some reflection, he offered me two hundred a-year if I would forbear from giving publicity to the circumstances of the marriage in Paris. Seeing that he was thus yielding, I at once declared that I would effect no such compromise—but that if he would double the amount I would listen to his terms. He agreed and we went together to the office of his attorney Mr. Robson, whom he instructed in my presence to pay me one hundred pounds a quarter. He introduced me as the Marchioness of Villebelle, in which name I was of course to sign the receipts. A hundred pounds were paid to me at once—and we separated.

"I purchased a horse, and amused myself with riding about the neighbourhood of my cottage-residence. And now it may be asked wherefore I did not renew my search after that village to which I had been taken by Mrs. Burnaby, and for that splendid mansion in the park where I had seen the invalid lady? The explanation is easily given. When I first made those researches, I was untainted by the consciousness of crime; and if I could have discovered a clue to that lady, I might have presented myself to her with an unblushing countenance, whether she were my mother or whatsoever degree of relationship she stood in towards me. But now it was very different!—and I shrank from the idea of making any discovery in that quarter. Therefore I studiously avoided riding in the direction which, so far as my memory served me, I had been taken that day by Mrs. Burnaby.

"Possessed of an income of four hundred a-year, it might be supposed that I had sufficient resources without the necessity of recurring to my evil ways of life. But without being able to account for it, I am forced to confess that I loved the excitement thereof. It had become to me the same as hunting or steeple-chasing to those who indulge in such sports. At this moment, when, thank heaven! my mind has assumed a better tone, I recoil in horror and with a shuddering aversion from the bare idea that I was ever influenced by such a morbid state of feeling. Such however was the case *then*: and from time to time I apparelled myself in my male garb, and mounting my horse, rode out at night upon the highway. Never did I perpetrate any violence: never did I harm a single hair of a human being's head. One night in the neighbourhood of Hornsey, I stopped an old man who was driving along in a gig. He assured me he had nothing about him worth the taking. I made him hand me his purse which, as I found, contained but a few shillings I gave it him back again, and was about to gallop away, when he said boldly that if I knew him better I could no doubt make his services available. He then told me, after a little more conversation, that his name was Solomon Patch, and that he kept a public-house in Agar Town, St. Pancras—that he was acquainted with a great many persons who lived at the expense of others—and that he gave an excellent price for whatsoever valuables might be brought to him. I replied that I should not forget the intimation—and we parted. Some time afterwards I visited this man's house in Agar Town, and found there a motley assemblage of wretches, male and female, whose looks bespoke their characters and their avocations. I gave them money wherewith to purchase liquor; and as Solomon Patch failed not to hint how we first became acquainted, they learnt what I was. They insisted upon knowing my name; but I only told them my christian one. Some person present at once dubbed me *Lady Bess*: and that is the name by which I have been known amongst them ever since. A short time after my adventure with Solomon Patch, I paid another visit to the Marshalls at Dover; and no longer feeling any shame at the career I was pursuing—but glorying in it rather than otherwise—I gave Kate an account of my various adventures. She told me in her turn that she had become engaged to a young man by the name of Russell, who was captain of a vessel ostensibly trading to the French and Spanish ports, but in reality engaged in the contraband trade. She added that Russell was making considerable sums of money; and that when he had amassed a fortune they were to be married.

"My history is now drawing to a close: but there is one incident that deserves special mention. One day, about six months ago, I was riding on horse-back, dressed in my female attire, through Edmonton—when a riderless steed galloped by me; and a little ahead I beheld a number of persons running to the assistance of a gentleman who had been thrown off. On reaching the spot, I instantaneously recognized in that individual my treacherous enemy James Knight! He was senseless: and indeed, at the first glance I felt assured he was dead. Such proved to be the fact. He was borne in to the house of a neighbouring surgeon, who pronounced life to be extinct, his skull having received a terrible fracture. I did not say at the time that I knew him: but when his person was searched to discover who he was, cards and letters were found upon him indicating both his name and address. On the following day I repaired to that address, being somewhat anxious to see Mrs. Knight and ascertain what her sentiments were in respect to the jewel business at Barcelona; for though I had recently been leading a life which might be supposed to render me but little scrupulous in such matters, yet I did not wish her to retain the impression that I had rewarded her kindness at the time by a black ingratitude. I had not forgotten how she had received me into her family when I was friendless and penniless at Havre after the robbery of the deligence; and I was anxious to re-establish myself in her good opinion, if I had really lost it. On arriving at the house, which was in a genteel street at the West End of the town, I found all the blinds drawn down, and the aspect of the dwelling denoted the sombre gloom of death. On sending in my name, I was speedily admitted, and was ushered into the presence of Mrs. Knight. She was overwhelmed with grief at her son's death: but she received me most kindly; and believing my visit to be one of condolence and sympathy towards herself, thanked me with fervid gratitude. I therefore saw at once that she entertained no evil opinion of me. After some little conversation she began to touch upon the incident which had made me flee from Barcelona so precipitately. She said that at the time she naturally believed I was really guilty of the theft of the jewels: but that when she received the letter which I wrote at Don Christoval's tower, and which I sent to the post through Frank at Southampton, she at once viewed the matter in quite a different light. She had questioned her son anew, and the confused answers he gave confirmed my tale of his villany. Then he confessed everything, expressing deep contrition for what he had done; and his mother forgave him. She did not make the most distant allusion to the incident of her son's subsequent meeting with me on the borders of the Pyrenees, and having to surrender up a portion of his clothing—or rather to make an exchange; and therefore I presumed that he had felt too much ashamed of his pusillanimity on the occasion to mention the event to his mother. With respect to her own affairs, she informed me that she had at length, and after a great deal of trouble, settled them satisfactorily, and that her fortune proved to be greater than she had at first anticipated. I condoled with her on the loss she had sustained in respect to her son—describing how I had witnessed the occurrence: and I took my leave of her, well pleased to find that I had not suffered in her good opinion."

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

A CHANGE OF ABODE.

Lady Bess having brought her narrative down to the point at which the preceding chapter concluded, went on to relate how she had one day encountered the Marquis of Villebelle, and how she promised to deliver up to him the various papers proving their marriage. The reader will recollect that in the earlier portion of this tale, Lady Bess charged a certain Tony Wilkins, at Solomon Patch's house at Agar Town, to present a sealed packet to a gentleman whom he would meet at King's Cross. The gentleman was the Marquis of Villebelle; and that packet contained the documents she had volunteered to give up.

She then proceeded to describe how, in company with Chiffin the Cannibal, she had waylaid Messrs. Marlow and Malton—how she had fled to Dover—and how one of the carrier-pigeons which Kate Marshall had given her, proved the means of extricating her from that dilemma. Then she, described how, some little time afterwards, she had met her brother Frank in the street, and how overjoyed as well as amazed she was to find that he was in the land of the living. She related everything Frank himself had told her in respect to his own history after he had quitted the school at Southampton—how he had obtained a situation at Court—how he had there recognized Lord Petersfield, and the two ladies whom he had twice seen in the companionship of her whom he believed to be his mother—how he had been abruptly but honourably removed from his situation in the Royal Household—and, how, through Lord Petersfield, he had obtained another place: namely, that in Lady Saxondale's service.

Lady Bess likewise described without reserve how she had called upon Lord Petersfield, and extracted the portrait which has so much excited Frank's attention, and which was subsequently recognized by Adolphus as that of his mother Lady Everton. Then Elizabeth Chandos entered more fully into details than she had done on the previous day, in respect to the researches she had made with regard to those circumstances that so closely concerned Adolphus: she minutely narrated all she had learnt from old Bob Shakerly; and she made no secret of the stratagem she had devised and executed for eliciting from Marlow and Malton the abode of Lady Everton. In the course of these explanations, she did not forget to state how Theodore Barclay had been bribed to betray what he knew concerning past events; and how it was through his suggestion she had called upon the lawyers.

"And now, Mr. Gunthorpe," she said, thus winding up her narrative, and speaking in a low and tremulous voice, full of emotions,—"I have unbosomed all my secrets to you, as if I were on a death-bed making revelations of everything! You are acquainted with all the errors of which I have been guilty: my whole life is before you. In whatsoever colours I now find myself in your presence, I at least have the satisfaction of having told the truth; for I repeat, there is within me the intuitive feeling that you had some right to demand these explanations at my hands. But you have promised not to be too severe in your blame; and the emotions which you have exhibited at many parts of my history, give me every reason to hope that you are not judging me too harshly,—too severely!"

"Heaven forbid, my dear Elizabeth!" said the old gentleman, down whose cheeks the tears were flowing fast: and this was not the first time he had been profoundly moved during the two hours which had elapsed since Lady Bess first commenced her history "Blame you—no!" he added, with sudden vehemence, as he wiped away those tears; and starting from his chair, he began to pace the room in the utmost agitation. "I cannot blame you! The blame rests with those villains who robbed yourself and your poor brother out of the ample fortunes which should have been yours, and which, by making you rich, would have elevated you high above the possibility of any temptation. Ah, yes! and there has been blame attaching to another—another, who should have looked after your welfare—who should not have left you both so completely at the mercy of those men—But no matter: the past cannot be recalled! In respect to you yourself, Elizabeth, there is at least one cause for rejoicing,—that as a woman you have not fallen—you have not disgraced yourself! And now show me once more that letter which you received from the Marquis of Villebelle when he was at Dover. You showed it to me yesterday—I wish to look at it again."

"Certainly," responded Lady Bess: and she hastened to produce from her writing-desk the epistle which Mr. Gunthorpe asked for. Its contents were as follow:—

"*Admiral's Head*, Dover,
"July 12, 1844.

"I have not hitherto had an opportunity of expressing my sincerest and most heartfelt thanks for the generous conduct you have observed towards me in respect to that strange transaction which took place in Paris five years back, and to which I need not more particularly allude. It is evident that Miss Marshall, the eldest daughter of the landlord of this inn, is to a certain extent your confidante; and she has this day rendered me a most signal service, the nature of which she will no doubt explain to you. I naturally conjecture that were it not for certain revelations which you must have at some time or another made to her, she would not have had it in her power to render me that service.

"I must now explain my principal object in penning these few lines; and being unacquainted with your address, I shall entrust the letter to Miss Marshall, that she may forward it. I just now had occasion to call at the residence of Sir John Marston, who is dwelling in this town. During his momentary absence from the room where he received me, I happened to glance at a paper which lay open from his desk. It was a letter addressed to him, and bearing the signature of a certain *Louisa Lloyd*—doubtless that same Mrs. Lloyd who was present at the transaction in Paris to which I have above alluded. In that letter my eye caught the names of *Elizabeth and Francis Paton*; and then immediately followed these words:—'*I hope and trust there is no possible chance of their discovering that their father is the Marquis of Eagledean.*' This is all I saw: for Sir John Marston returned to the room immediately afterwards. I do not know whether you have already made the discovery which Mrs. Lloyd appears so earnestly to hope that you have not: but I consider the matter to be one of sufficient importance to be at once communicated to you. If, by making such communication, I am rendering you the slightest service, I shall feel truly rejoiced; and though I must always remain your debtor for your generous conduct in giving up those documents some weeks back, yet may I hope that the contents of this letter will acquit me of some part of the immense obligation I owe you.

"Permit me to subscribe myself

"Your devoted friend and well-wisher,

"VILLEBELLE."

Mr. Gunthorpe perused this letter with as much attention as if he had not read it on the preceding day; and as he handed it back to Elizabeth, he appeared to be absorbed in the deepest reflection, still pacing the room to and fro. Suddenly stopping short, he was about to say something, when she exclaimed, as she glanced forth from the window, "*Here* are Frank and Adolphus returning from their walk!"

Mr. Gunthorpe looked at his watch, and said, "It is close upon two o'clock, at which hour I ordered my carriage to return. Elizabeth, it was my purpose to have made certain relevations to you, which it is necessary you should learn: but I cannot do it now. You must restrain your impatience yet a little while——"

"But tell me, Mr. Gunthorpe," she said, in a tone of anxious entreaty, "who are you, and wherefore do you take such an interest in the affairs of Frank and myself? Do tell me—I beseech you to tell me!——One word will suffice——Frank and Adolphus are entering the house——Quick, quick! do speak that word!"

"I am the bosom-friend of the Marquis of Eagledean," he replied in a hurried manner.

Elizabeth Chandos looked disappointed, but yet somewhat bewildered and incredulous.

"Hush!" said Mr. Gunthorpe; "no more now! But as the friend of your father—as one acquainted with all his secrets—and one having full power to act on his behalf, you must suffer me to take certain immediate steps in respect to yourselves."

"Do what you will, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lady Bess: "for we are in your hands."

At this moment Adolphus and Frank entered the room, and were much delighted to find Mr. Gunthorpe there. Warm greetings were exchanged; and refreshments being placed upon the table, the old gentleman gladly accepted a glass of wine—for he had evidently passed through a sad and exciting ordeal while listening to Elizabeth's history. By the time luncheon was over his carriage drew up in front of the cottage.

"Now," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "you are all three about to quit this place and remove to my residence. Do not look upon me thus with so much astonishment: I am perfectly serious. Yes—for many, many reasons must you all three come and take up your abode beneath my roof. Let your preparations be hastily made. Some of my servants shall come in the course of the day and fetch away your boxes. Adolphus—Frank—go to your rooms and get in readiness. Elizabeth, remain here with me."

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The two young men hesitated not to obey Mr. Gunthorpe's directions; and when they had quitted the apartment, he turned towards the lady, saying, "You will permit me to dispose as I choose of your furniture and such matters beneath this roof. I can assure you, Elizabeth, you will never require them again. Now go and send back to Miss Marshall the carrier-pigeons which she gave you: and if you choose to forward by one of them a little billet, to the effect that altered circumstances on your part preclude the possibility of your ever more needing these feathered agents, it will perhaps be as well. You understand me Elizabeth? Go, my dear girl. And tell Rosa—for that I think is your servant's name—to come hither, as I wish to speak to her."

Elizabeth obeyed these instructions as deferentially as Adolphus and Frank and hastened to fulfil those which they on their part had received; and Rosa came into the presence of Mr. Gunthorpe.

"My good young woman," said he, "your mistress, her brother, and their guest are about to leave this abode. I am well aware that you are acquainted with much—too much, concerning Mrs. Chandos. I am not however going to utter a word of blame or reproach on account of the past; but I wish to make it well worth your while to bury in oblivion all you do know concerning that lady. She will leave the cottage just as it is. There is a lease, I believe—and that you can have: all the furniture is likewise your's. Here are fifty pounds for your immediate wants; and every half-year you will receive a cheque from me for the sum of twenty-five pounds. Upon an annual income of fifty pounds you can live respectably. You may take lodgers to make up enough to pay your rent. But all this is done for you on condition that you set a seal upon your lips in respect to whatsoever you may know concerning Mrs. Chandos. Now go upstairs—fetch down her male apparel—take it into the kitchen—and tear it to pieces. I shall come in a few minutes and see that you have done so. Go: but take your money—and don't stand staring at me in this vacant bewildered manner."

Thus did Mr. Gunthorpe issue his commands; and Rosa, finding that he was altogether serious—as indeed the bank-notes he had placed upon the table fully proved—hastened to obey him. In a few minutes the old gentleman, who seemed determined to do things in quite a business-like manner, found his way into the kitchen, and expressed his satisfaction when he perceived that Rosa had literally fulfilled his instructions and had torn up Lady Bess's frock coat, waistcoat, and trousers into shreds.

"There," he, said; "that will do. By the bye, there's a horse? She will have no further need of that—and you may cause it to be sold and take the proceeds for yourself. But mind that it is sold."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Gunthorpe retracted his way to the parlour, where he was speedily joined by Adolphus, Frank, and Elizabeth. The lady threw upon him a significant look, to imply that his instructions in respect to the pigeons had been duly carried into effect. They then all four entered the carriage, which drove away towards Stamford Hill.

"It is my wish," said Mr. Gunthorpe, while proceeding thither, "that you, Elizabeth, should resume your maiden name of Miss Paton. It is by this name you will be known beneath my roof."

Frank glanced towards his sister in a manner which showed that he saw full plainly she had been telling all the history of her past adventures to Mr. Gunthorpe: and while he was rejoiced that she should resume her maiden name, thereby severing herself as it were from several painful reminiscences, he could not help admiring the generosity of their kind-hearted friend, whose benevolence continued unchanged towards her. As for Adolphus, he was too much inexperienced in the ways of the world to think that there was anything very peculiar in the intimation which Mr. Gunthorpe had just given relative to the resumption of Elizabeth's maiden name; while the lady herself was prepared to follow in all things the instructions of one who appeared to have such full authority to issue them.

On arriving at the mansion, Adolpus, Elizabeth, and Frank were provided with handsome apartments: two valets were assigned as special attendants upon the young gentlemen respectively; so that Francis Paton, from having been a page himself, had one to wait upon him. A female dependant was attached to Elizabeth in the quality of lady's-maid: and thus was it evident by all these arrangements, that Mr. Gunthorpe purposed to treat his guests with the utmost kindness and distinction. He sent off a note desiring Mrs. Leyden, Henrietta, and little Charley, to come and dine at the Manor at five o'clock; and when the whole party assembed in the magnificent drawing-room, the old gentleman appeared resolved to banish from his mind whatsoever cares or disagreeable reflections were harboured therein, that he might both enjoy and enhance the happiness which he was thus diffusing around him.

And it was indeed a happy party gathered on this occasion! Need we say that Henrietta and Adolphus sat together at the dinner-table, and likewise in the drawing-room in the evening? Or need we add that they experienced all the delight enjoyed by lovers who behold no barrier to the progress of their affection and its ultimate felicity? Mrs. Leyden, too, was amply recompensed, in her altered circumstances and prospects, for the many troubles and misfortunes which she had gone through: while little Charley was never tried of gazing around in childish wonder upon the splendid apartments, with their sumptuous furniture and their brilliant lights.

On the following morning Adolphus proceeded to call upon Henrietta, in pursuance of a suggestion which Mr. Gunthorpe threw out—or rather a permission which he gave: for the young nobleman was docile as a child, and almost as unsophisticated as one,—being yet too timid and bashful to take any important step of his own accord. Alas, so considerable a portion of his life had been spent in a close and cruel confinement! Mr. Gunthorpe had purposely sent him out of the way that he might have an opportunity of making certain important revelations to Elizabeth and Frank. Accordingly, as soon as Adolphus had taken his departure in the carriage which was placed at his disposal to convey him to Mrs. Leyden's cottage, the old gentleman conducted Elizabeth and Frank to the library of the mansion; and taking a chair, he bade them seat themselves opposite to him, and listen attentively to the narrative he was about to unfold. There was a fervid curiosity in the mind of the youth; and though this same feeling was also experienced by his sister, it was blended on her part with a kind of solemn awe; for she was eight years older than her brother, and therefore more thoughtful in respect to the incidents which were now occurring, and more shrewd in forming certain suspicions and conjectures on particular points. When they were both seated near Mr. Gunthorpe, he addressed them in the following manner:—

"I am about to speak of Lady Everton—I am about to tell you much regarding that unfortunate lady. It was for this reason that I have excluded Adolphus from our present conference: for it would be sad and mournful for him to hear the tale of his mother's frailty and dishonour. You, Elizabeth, have acted wisely and well in keeping secret from him the suspicions which yourself and Frank have entertained in respect to Lady Everton; and it will be a matter of serious consideration for us all—perhaps too for Lady Everton herself—whether Adolphus shall ever have the veil torn from his eyes in respect to his mother's secrets. For those suspicions on your part, Elizabeth—those suspicions on your part, Frank—are indeed well founded——Lady Everton is your mother!"

This announcement, although so fully expected, was received in deep silence—but also with deep emotion: and then, as if by a simultaneous ebullition of feeling at thus acquiring the certainty that the lady whom they had seen in their earlier years, and who had wept over them, was indeed their mother,—Elizabeth and Francis threw themselves into each other's arms, mingled their tears, and embraced tenderly. Mr. Gunthorpe rose from his seat and walked to and fro in deep agitation: but suddenly calming his emotions, he resumed his chair, saying somewhat abruptly, "Let me not hesitate any longer to enter upon the narrative of the past. Give me your attention—interrupt me not in its progress—but listen in silence, as I listened yesterday, Elizabeth, to the tale which you revealed to me."

Then, perceiving that the brother and sister were anxiously awaiting the promised narrative, Mr. Gunthorpe related those particulars which will be found in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

LADY EVERTON.

Name

"It was in the beginning of the year 1814 that Lord Everton conducted to the altar (Alexandrina,) sister of Sir John Marston. His lordship was a Colonel in the army—had served for some years in India, where he had greatly distinguished himself—and had amassed considerable wealth. He was forty years of age, but looked considerably older,—his constitution having suffered by the influences of an oriental climate, the fatigues of active service, and the wounds he had sustained. To speak truthfully, he was neither handsome in person nor prepossessing in manners. He had all the imperious habit of command and the authoritative severity of a soldier. He was far more fitted to preside in a camp, than to shine in a drawing-room. Alexandrina was but sixteen when she thus became Lady Everton. She was one of the most beautiful creatures ever seen—intellectually accomplished, of fascinating manners, and of most amiable disposition. Even if her affections had not been engaged to another, her marriage with an individual more than double her age, and whom she could not possibly love, must have been regarded as a cruel sacrifice. But her affections *were* engaged: she loved the Hon. Paton Staunton, who was at that time in his thirtieth year. But Mr. Staunton, though the nephew of the then Marquis of Eagledean, appeared not to have any chance of succeeding to the title and estates of his uncle; inasmuch as the Marquis had two sons. Moreover, Mr. Staunton was poor, having but a few hundreds a year: the Marston family was likewise poor; and thus Alexandrina, unable to marry the objects of her affections, was sacrificed to the lordly and wealthy soldier.

"Mr. Staunton was a Member of Parliament, and noted for the extreme liberality of his political opinions: he was at the time the only man in the House of Commons who dared raise his voice to assert that the people had rights from which they were most unjustly debarred—that the country was ruled by an arrogant, a selfish, and a rapacious oligarchy—and that what was termed 'British freedom' was one of the most detestable of mockeries. Now, his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean was a staunch Tory: he hated his nephew Paton Staunton for his republican notions,—while on the other hand, Mr. Staunton finding that his narrow-minded relative would not permit liberty of conscience, proudly forbore from asking him any favour. It was therefore in consequence of Mr. Staunton's poverty and want of fine prospects, that Alexandrina Marston was hurried to the altar to become the bride of another man.

"In 1816, two years after the marriage, Adolphus was born. In the course of a few months the affairs of India became so threatening, and some of the native princes obtained such successes over the British troops, that it was found necessary to confer the command of the Anglo-Indian army upon an officer of tried experience, skill and valour. The Government of the day offered the post to Lord Everton: he accepted it—and, with the rank of General, proceeded to India. It cost him no considerable pang to leave his young wife and newborn child: for he was a man whose ambition towered high above all the softer feelings of humanity. It would however be alike untruthful and unjust to affirm that he experienced no emotion at all on parting from them. About the same time that this appointment took place, the Marquis of Eagledean died, his elder son succeeding to the title; and in a few months after this, an accident occurred which all in a moment produced a remarkable change in the position and circumstances of the Hon. Paton Staunton. The new Marquis of Eagledean, with his brother—both young men—were upset in a boat on the Thames near Twickenham, and were drowned. They were unmarried—and thus Paton Staunton abruptly received the intelligence that he had become Marquis of Eagledean, with large estates and a revenue of thirty thousand a year.

"From the time of Alexandrina's marriage with Lord Everton, she and Paton had not met. Soon after her husband's departure for India, she became attached as principal lady-in waiting to the Princess Sophia; and at one of the receptions given by that Princess, in her apartments at St. James's Palace, she met the former object of her affection, who had recently become Marquis of Eagledean. That meeting was an interesting one,—one full of a touching pathos and of sorrowful reflections for both; inasmuch as they soon discovered that their mutual love had abated not—but was, if possible, stronger than ever. They could not help thinking that if only two or three short years had been allowed to elapse ere Alexandrina was disposed of in marriage, she might have accompanied to the altar the individual who had won her heart and whose position in life had been destined to undergo so remarkable a change. That meeting led to others. Alexandrina's husband was far away —she did not love him—she scarcely even respected him, because she felt that she had been dragged as his victim to the altar: she knew that her loveliness had served as a chaplet to be interwoven amidst the laurels which adorned his brow. The Marquis of Eagledean remained unmarried—he had vowed never to marry—his heart cherished the image of Alexandrina: and she knew all this. Their meetings did not continue innocent: their mutual passion was above control: they were culpable. In a short time Lady Everton found that she was in a way to become a mohter. She made a confidante of her principal lady's maid, Mrs. Burnaby, who was a widow and a trustworthy person. I should moreover observe that she was a reduced gentlewoman at the time she first entered Lady Everton's service—that she was well educated—and altogether the most eligible female for the important trust to be reposed in her. But it was necessary to admit others into Alexandrina's confidence;—and the house-keeper at Everton Park, likewise a discreet and kind hearted woman was one. Another was the maid next in rank to Mrs. Burnaby; and then came the medical man who attended upon the household at the Park. But all the arrangements were so well settled, and the persons engaged were so trustworthy, that Alexandrina's position remained unsuspected by the world; and in due course a daughter was born. This was in 1818. The cottage near Tottenham had been already hired and furnished; and a wet-nurse was engaged. To that abode did Mrs. Burnaby repair with the infant, on whom the name of Elizabeth Paton was bestowed.

"After this event the Marquis of Eagledean quitted England, with Alexandrina's full concurrence: for they found that, considering the strength of their mutual love, such separation was necessary for her honour and security. But this parting was indeed most painful, and required all their strength of mind for the accomplishment. For six years did the Marquis remain on the Continent, chiefly in France: but at the expiration of that time business compelled him to return to England. He believed that he had so far conquered the romantic ardour of his love for Alexandrina, that they might now meet as friends. He wrote to her: and she expressed in reply a similar opinion. They did meet: and for some short time they exercised so powerful a control over their feelings that they never touched upon the topic of their love. And yet they both knew that they were standing again upon the edge of a precipiece: they both felt that so far from time having mitigated the fervour of their devotion towards each other, it continued unextinguishable—immitigable. It was a deathless sentiment, triumphing over time—defying the lapse of years—interwoven with the very principles of their existence. General Lord Everton was still absent in India, where his presence was required. He was amassing wealth—he was gathering fresh laurels—and yet his work, either for his country or himself, appeared to be only half done; for his letters contained no intimation of the probability of an early return to England. If ever there were extenuation for female frailty, surely it existed for Lady Everton under all those circumstances? The man whom she was forced to accompany to the altar, had been for years absent—while that other man to whom her heart's first and only affections were given, was once more present, and the opportunities for their meeting were frequent. They were again culpable: again did Lady Everton find herself in a condition to become a mother; and again, with the assistance of Mrs. Burnaby and the others who were in the former secret, was a child born. This was in the year 1826. The infant was conveyed away to the cottage; and on him the name of Francis Paton was bestowed.

"There was now another separation. Alexandrina and the Marquis, bitterly deploring the past, resolved that the future should remain untainted by criminality. He went abroad again, well-nigh broken-hearted at the necessity for bidding farewell to the object of his first and only love, and at the anguished state of mind in which he had left her. It was even agreed between them that there should not be the slightest epistolary correspondence—nothing that should increase the yearning they were but too certain to experience towards each other. What to the Marquis of Eagledean was his lordly title ? what his immense wealth ? They could offered him no consolation. He had long considered the first as but an empty bauble ; and he only valued the latter as a means of enabling him to do good. Eighteen months elapsed ; and during the period the Marquis resided in Paris. His time was chiefly employed in visiting the abodes of want and poverty, and ministering to the relief of the sufferers. Whatever he found an aching heart, it became a solace to him to afford condolence : wherever he found honest penury sinking into despair with its vain struggle against the world, it soothed his own soul to be enabled to succour it. Nor less did he penetrate into the dens of vice and demoralization, to drag up from those sloughs such unfortunates as would accept the hand stretched forth to their assistance. It was thus, as I have said, that eighteen months passed away ; and at the expiration of this period the Marquis of Eagledean read in an English newspaper, that General Lord Everton, having finished his career in India, was resolved to return home. A few days afterwards another paragraph intimated that he might be expected to arrive in London in about five or six months.

"The Marquis of Eagledean now felt it to be a paramount duty to make ample provision for his two children Elizabeth and Frank. He had never seen either of them from the moment of their birth : he dared not see them : he felt that if he were to do so, he should long to have them with him—to take charge of them—to adopt them and acknowledge them as his own. But how could he do this ? He would have to bring them up, stigmatized with illegitimacy ; and when they should ask him who their mother was, how could he respond to the question ? Besides, if he suddenly appeared before the world with those two children acknowledged as his own,—and as illegitimate too, for he dared not pretend that they were otherwise,—wonder would be excited, suspicions might arise, inquiries might take place, and the truth be traced out. It was known to many that he had been Alexandrina's suitor previous to her marriage with General Lord Everton ; and as her husband had been for so many years absent, the tongue of scandal would not fail to whisper a surmise which might ultimately be proved the actual truth. No : every possible precaution must be taken to shield Alexandrina's honour from danger and detraction ; and the births of those children must therefore remain buried in impenetrable mystery.) Thus was it that the Marquis of Eagledean had never dared to pay even the most stealthy visit to that cottage where his children were kept in the care of Mrs. Burnaby ; and this was not the least violence that he was compelled to exercise over his feelings. But now that Lord Everton was on the point of returning from India, the Marquis felt it a paramount duty to give Alexandrina the assurance that the two children would be amply provided for, and that she need experience no anxiety with regard to their future welfare. The Marquis accordingly resolved to pay one more visit to England, to settle this business, and then bid his native land a long farewell—if not an eternal one—so that he might avoid the chance of encountering her whose image was enshrined in his heart. But on repairing to England on the occasion, and for the purpose named, he solemnly vowed that he would not seek an interview with Alexandrina. He wrote to her, stating that he was again in London—explaining the purpose for which he was there—imploring her to pardon him for having thus broken the compact mutually agreed upon, that no epistolary correspondence was to take place between them—and requesting only that she would give such suggestions or instructions as she thought fit relative to a mode of settling the fortune he destined for their two children. He declared his intention of devoting the sum of one hundred thousand pounds to this purpose, so that they might have a fortune of fifty thousand pounds each.

"Alexandrina, who was then staying at Everton Park, which is about twenty miles from London, wrote back promptly to the Marquis of Eagledean —expressing her admiration for what she was pleased to term his noble generosity on behalf of their children, and declaring that his proposal to that effect had tended to relieve her mind from the utmost anxiety. As to the mode of settling the money, she had but little to suggest. She however wished them to be brought up in a comparatively humble though comfortable and respectful manner—but not with any extravagant ideas or elevated notions which in after life might lead them to make searching inquiries into the mystery of their birth. Moreover, as they would have to go forth into the world, when they grew up, without advantage of relations and friends to counsel and advise them,—and as under such circumstances she trembled for their future welfare, dreading lest they should fall into error,—she besought that they might be reared in ignorance of the handsome fortunes to which they would be entitled, so that they would stand the less chance of falling into the hands of designing persons ere they arrived at years of discretion. For Alexandrina rightly considered that it was a fearful thing for a young woman and a young man to enter upon life in a comparative friendless manner, and without having passed through an ordeal of experience to teach them how to value and make a good use of the fortunes which they were to inherit. Therefore did she suggest that they should be brought up in ignorance of the wealth in store for them until they reached that age at which it might safely be entrusted to their keeping. Having thus expressed her views, she left all the rest to the discretion of the Marquis of Eagledean; and she displayed sufficient strength of mind to forbear from hinting at her desire for an interview.

"I have already said that Alexandrina was staying at Everton Park at the time when this correspondance took place between herself and the Marquis of Eagledean. She had several visitors there at the time. One was her brother, Sir John Marston, accompanied by his wife: for he had very recently been married. There were likewise Lord and Lady Petersfield, who were on intimate terms with the Everton and Marston families. Lord Petersfield at that time presided over the household of the Princess Sophia, in which Lady Everton still retained her situation—though it was rather a nominal than a real one. Another visitor at the Park on the occasion, was Mr. Everton, her brother-in-law. This gentleman was unmarried—of moderate fortune—and supposed to be of rather unsteady habits. Rumour had indeed whispered that he was dissipated and addicted to the gambling-table: but nothing positive was known on these points. In the world he passed for an honourable man; and on account of his social position, he moved in the highest circles. His sister-in-law had never liked him: she often spoke of him with aversion to the Marquis of Eagledean; but as her husband's brother, she was forced to receive his visits with a becoming courtesy. Besides, Lord Everton, previous to leaving England to assume his military command in India, had requested his brother to visit the Park and the other estates from time to time, to assure himself that the stewards and bailiffs performed their duty.

"To resume the thread of my narrative, I must state that one day—shortly after the correspondence of which I have spoken between Alexandrina and the Marquis of Eagledean—her ladyship was seated in the drawing-room at the Park,—her brother, her brother-in-law, and Lord Petersfield being present at the time. Lady Petersfield and Lady Marston, as it appeared, were out riding or walking together, with little Adolphus. The conversation in the drawing-room turned upon the expected arrival of Lord Everton, who was to be in England in the course of a few months. Lord Petersfield—who then possessed a far more courtly affability than has characterized him of the late years, since he entered a diplomatic career and assumed its solemn aspect and its studied reserve,—expatiated upon what he regarded, or pretended to regard, as the delight and joy with which her ladyship would welcome her husband home after his long absence. Poor Alexandrina felt deeply distressed. No doubt,—and it was natural enough,—she was smitten with horror and remorse for her past conduct, and experienced a guilty dread at meeting the husband to whom she had proved unfaithful. In short she was so completely overcome by her feelings that she fell back in a sudden swoon. Her brother, Sir John Marston, hastily snatched up a decanter of water, and sprinkled some upon her countenance; while Lord Petersfield and Mr. Everton tore at the bells to summon assistance. But ere any of her ladyship's female dependants had time to reach the room, she began to return to consciousness; and in the dimness and confusion of her first ideas she let fall some expressions which more than betraryed the fatal secret. Starting up in a sudden access of frenzy—aware of the tremendous inadvertence which she had committed—she gazed upon her brother, her brother-in-law, and Lord Petersfield in a manner which confirmed the suspicions just engendered in their minds. They consigned her to her maids; and heaven alone knows, besides themselves, what took place between those three men when alone together. In the course of the afternoon Sir John Marston repaired to his sister's chamber, and told her frankly that Mr. Everton had searched her writing-desk, and had discovered documentary proofs of her illicit connexion with the Marquis of Eagledean. Poor Alexandrina threw herself at her brother's feet, beseeching he would intercede with Mr. Everton not to expose and ruin her. Sir John Marston assured her that both himself and Lord Petersfield had already exerted their united influence with Mr. Everton to this effect, and that he had promised to throw the veil of secrecy over her guilt—but only on the condition that the Marquis should at once leave England, with the solemn pledge not to revisit its shores for many long, long years. Alexandrina wrote a letter to Lord Eagledean, telling him what had occurred, and beseeching him to give the sacred promise upon which her fate depended. This letter Mr. Everton determined to bear himself to the Marquis, so that he might, as he alleged, be satisfied as to the reply.

"Proceeding at once to London, Mr. Everton called upon the Marquis of Eagledean, who was plunged into despair at the fearful occurrence which had thus exposed the unfortunate Alexandrina's frailty. The Marquis did not upbraid Mr. Everton for having violated the sanctity of his sister-in-laws's desk. He was too anxious to conciliate him. Moreover, he could not help feeling that when once that gentleman's suspicions were aroused, he had a right to adopt any means to discover proofs of the infidelity of his absent brother's wife. Mr. Everton renewed his proposal that if the Marquis would leave England with a solemn promise to remain absent for a long series of years, and to desist from all correspondence with Alexandrina, he would spare the exposure of her dishonour. Lord Eagledean was but too rejoiced to assent to this decision. Indeed, it only embodied the resolve to which his own mind had been previously made up, and which he had expressed in his last letter to Lady Everton. In short, he left himself entirely in the hands of her brother-in-law, Sir John Marston, and Lord Petersfield, to all of whom the fatal secret had thus become known. He even proposed to take the children away with him to some far-off clime, and there bring them up in utter ignorance of the secret of their birth. But to this Mr. Everton would not listen; and he advanced as his reason several arguments similar to those which had constituted Lord Eagledean's own motives for leaving the children completely in the care of Mrs. Burnaby. The settlement of the hundred thousand pounds upon those two children, was next deliberated upon—as this step was to be taken before the Marquis could leave England. Mr. Everton suggested that the amount should be longed in the Bank of England, or with the Marquis of Eagledean's own private bankers, in the joint names of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston,—as they two, having become acquainted with the secret, were the most eligible trustees who could be selected. The Marquis entertained no objection to this arrangement. He was well acquainted with Lord Petersfield, whom he believed to be a man of the strictest probity; and with regard to Sir John Marston, it was natural to include him in the trusteeship, he being Alexandrina's brother. An appointment was accordingly made for all four—namely, the Marquis, Lord Petersfield, Mr. Everton, and Sir John Marston—to meet on the following day and discuss the matter further.

"When this interview was over, Lord Eagledean proceeded to consult his bankers, and also his solicitor, upon the best method of carrying out the arrangements,—confessing to them, under their solemn pledge of secrecy, that Elizabeth and Francis Paton were his own illegitimate children: but as a matter of course, Lady Everton's name was kept out of the question. To the solicitor the Marquis explained that he wished certain restrictions to be placed upon the powers of the trustees, so that they should only carry out such instructions as he might think fit to record for their guidance, without affording them even a discretionary control over the fortunes of the children or the children themselves. In thus speaking, the Marquis had in view the suggestions which he had received from Lady Everton, as I have already described them. On the following day the meeting took place between the Marquis, Lord Petersfield, Mr. Everton, and Sir John Marston. Sir John was the bearer of a letter from his sister Alexandrina to the Marquis of Eagledean, and which she had left open that its contents might be seen to be only of a business character. Therein she recapitulated all the suggestions she had previously afforded, and all the apprehensions she entertained for the future welfare of the children. One passage ran somewhat to this effect:—It is chiefly for our daughter Elizabeth that I tremble. Frank, when he grows up to man's estate, will feel the want of relations and friends far less than his sister. Her sex naturally exposes her to other temptations and more fatal errors. It would be well if on the attainment of her majority, she could be eligibly married—but without in the least degree forcing the natural bent of her affections. It may be deemed a weakness on my part—but it will nevertheless afford me considerable satisfaction, and in after years relieve me of much of the anxiety which will otherwise harass my mind on her account—if by such marriage a real rank could be conferred upon her, so that in the possession of a titled name and an elevated social position, the mystery of her parentage and the obscurity of her name may be lost sight of. With such a fortune as she will possess through your bounty she may well aspire to such a marriage. I do not mean that she is to be dragged to the altar and forced to wed some titled personage: no heaven forbid! But I should venture to recommend that if a brilliant marriage in accordance with her own feelings can be effected when she attains her majority, her fortune should be placed at her disposal; but on no account should she be permitted to receive more than the interest of her money until she does contract a matrimonial alliance.'

"Such were Alexandrina's suggestions in reference to Elizabeth. Now, although the Marquis of Eagledean himself despised aristocratic titles, and cared nothing for the one which he himself bore, he was nevertheless prepared to adopt the wishes of the unhappy Alexandrina; and to this effect did he express his intentions to Lord Petersfield, Sir John Marston, and Mr. Everton. They offered no objection; and when the meeting broke up, he repaired to his solicitor for the purpose of giving him final instructions with regard to the trust deed. It will perhaps take some little trouble to explain in lucid terms the details of this deed: but the task must be attempted. In the first place Lord Eagledean undertook to lodge the sum of one hundred thousand pounds in his banker's hands, to be retained by them for the benefit of Elizabeth and Francis Paton, and in the trusteeship of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston. He apportioned fifty thousand pounds to be Elizabeth's fortune, and fifty-thousand pounds to be the fortune of Francis,—together with all the accumulations of interest which might remain for both after the annual deduction of four hundred pounds for their joint maintenance until they should become entitled to their fortunes. The deed provided that should either die, the other was to become entitled to the whole amount; and that should they both die, the amount was to revert to himself (the Marquis of Eagledean) or to his heirs. In respect to the fortune of Elizabeth, he introduced the following provisions into the deed:—that if on the attainment of her twenty-first year, she contracted a marriage with some eligible and proper person, who by his rank and social position could place her upon a high standing, and confer upon her an honourable name, she was at once to receive possession of her fortune: but that so long as she remained unmarried, she was merely to receive the interest, the capital remaining in the banker's hands. Or again, if she contracted a marriage which in the opinion of her two guardians was derogatory and unworthy, she should still receive only the interest of the money, without any power over the capital; and on no account was the fortune to be settled on her husband or alienated from her own possession. In respect to Francis, the Marquis of Eagledean provided by the trust-deed that on the attainment of his twenty-first year, he should become possessed of the full annual interest of his fortune: but that he should not enter upon the enjoyment of the capital until the attainment of his twenty fifth year. Moreover, the bankers were charged not to pay over the respective fortunes without receiving at the time satisfactory proof that the above-mentioned conditions were duly complied with.

"Such was the nature of the trust-deed drawn up, and which, as a matter of course, was far more explicit in its details than the sketch which I have just given. It necessarily took several days to complete all these arrangements,—during which interval the Marquis of Eagledean was compelled to remain in England; but as Alexandrina continued to reside at Everton Park, they did not meet. Nor did he make the slightest attempt to see her: for he felt that it would be most unbecoming and indelicate to do so under existing circumstances. At length the business was concluded—the necessary documents were signed—the money was deposited in the banker's hands—and the Marquis of Eagledean quitted England. He repaired to Germany, and settled himself at Baden. Some few months afterwards he read in an English newspaper of the death of the Hon. Adolphus Everton, son of Lord and Lady Everton, aged twelve years, and very soon after that, he read an account of the return of his lordship to England. Deeply did he dread what might be the result of the meeting between Alexandrina and her husband; she had already betrayed her secret in a swoon—the same frightful accident might occur again. But no: it did not appear that there was any ground for this apprehension,—inasmnch as the English newspapers frequently made mention of Lord and Lady Everton; and thus, as their names were coupled in the record of their movements, it was to be inferred that they lived together without a suspicion on her husband's part of his wife's dishonour. But Lord Everton had not been many months in England, ere death overtook him; and when the Marquis of Eagledean read the account of his demise, it was with a feeling that can be better imagined than described. Oh! might he not now hope that, after the usual period of widowhood, Alexandrina would become his wife? He however remained in Baden, considering that it would be the height of indelicacy and impropriety to present himself to Lady Everton too soon after her husband's death. A year thus elapsed; and the Marquis now thought that it would be no longer indiscreet to return to England. But then arose in his mind the memory of that solemn pledge he had given to remain absent a long series of years. Perhaps it was straining a point to consider that this interdiction continued valid after Lord Everton's death: but still the Marquis of Eagledean was punctilious upon the subject—and he resolved to write to the brother, who had assumed the title, and ascertain his feeling upon the subject. In due course an answer was received. Lord Everton (as I had better call him for distinction's sake, although he has all along been a base usurper) wrote a long letter in which he declared that he had consulted his sister-in-law with regard to the present state of her feeling towards the Marquis, and that she had vowed to pass the remainder of her life in widowhood, as an atonement to the memory of him whom she had dishonoured. Lord Everton went on to say in his letter, that he himself considered such atonement to be strictly due to the memory of his deceased brother; and he insisted that the Marquis of Eagledean should adhere faithfully to the solemn pledge; namely, to remain absent from England. Lord Eagledean was cruelly afflicted by the contents of this letter: yet he felt persuaded that Alexandrina was acting under the coercian of her brother-in-law, even if she had been consulted at all in the matter. He therefore wrote to Alexandrina, explaining everything that Lord Everton had said and requesting a frank and unreserved avowal of her own sentiments. He appealed to her, in the name of that fervid love which for so many years they had experienced for each other—he enjoined her by all the circumstances of the past, not to send him a reply which would banish hope from his breast—and he suggested that if her brother-in-law stillinsisted on the fulfilment of the pledge of self-expatriation, she might join him on the Continent, where their hands could be united in matrimony. He said that he was well aware he was already violating one part of his pledge, which had been to the effect that all correspondence should cease between them: but he pleaded as an excuse the altered circumstances of their relative position arising from her husband's death. He concluded by declaring that upon her response depended all his future conduct towards her: for that if she, by her own accord, reiterated what her brother-in-law had already said to her he should, as a man of honour and delicacy, regard her decision as final and as one too solemn and sacred to admit of any additional appeal on his part.

"Most anxiously did the Marquis of Eagledean await the reply to this letter. It came at the expiration of a few weeks: it proved a death-blow to his hopes: the decision was adverse to his fondest expectation! In this reply Lady Everton assured him that the death of her husband had awakened her to the sense of the grievous wrong she had done him—that her peace of mind was destroyed for ever—that her happiness was annihilated—and that were she even to see the Marquis again, his presence would drive her to despair. She conjured him to study, as well as he was able, to banish her image from his mind: or, if he must still continue to think of her, that he would only regard her in the light of a friend sincerely wishing him well but whom he must never see again. She repeated what her brother-in-law had said—to the effect that by crushing within her bosom all inclination to enter the marriage-state again, she might make some atonement to the spirit of her departed husband, and that as she had proved unfaithful to him in life, she would prove faithful to his memory after death. She assured the Marquis that she penned that letter of her own accord—without coercion—and even without the knowledge of Lord Everton; that its contents were the spontaneous effusion of her own heart, dictated by a religious piety of feeling, which she implored him not to disturb. The Marquis of Eagledean submitted to this decision: but he did not believe that Alexandrina was a free Agent when she wrote that letter. Nevertheless, if she were indeed under the coercion of her brother-in-law, he saw that it must be through a threat that her past conduct should be exposed to the world; and the Marquis was prepered to make any sacrifice of his own feelings, and to consent that she should do the same on her part, rather than see her name dragged through the mire of opprobrium, scorn, and dishonour. He felt assured that Everton was a villain; but Alexandrina was too completely in his power to permit the possibility of his being thwarted. Nevertheless, deeply—Oh! most deeply, did he compassionate that woman whom he loved so tenderly and so enduringly; and it cost him a severe struggle and many bitter pang, to abstain from flying back to England and imploring her to dare all consequences—exposure, shame, and the ruin of her reputation—rather than consent to an eternal severance. Yet he *did* exercise this mastery over himself; and from that instant the whole aspect of the world was completely changed to the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Leaving Germany, the Marquis repaired to Italy, and settled himself at Naples. There he assumed another name—the name of a civilian. He thus laid aside his rank in order that he might dispense with the train of attendants, the pomp, the splendour, and the ceremony, which it would have been necessary to support had he maintained that rank. At Naples he dwelt in a private manner,—avoiding society, and using his immense wealth in doing good to the utmost of his power. Years passed on—and with his mind, so did his person change. Care and sorrow altered his countenance; and at length it became impossible to recognise in him the once handsome and fascinating Marquis of Eagledean. For those who knew him many, many long years ago, can truthfully aver that he *was* both handsome in person and fascinating in manners: and if they beheld him *now*, they would not entertain the slightest suspicion of his identity. But as those years of self-expatriation passed on, the tone of his mind acquired a degree of resignation which prevented him from falling into complete cynicism and misanthropy. Nay, more—he even learnt to smile again at times—to put on a cheerful aspect—and to deport himself with a blunt good-humour. His habits had naturally become eccentric from the secluded life he had led for so long a period; and indeed, it is often in eccentricity on the part of old men, that the sense of past cares and sorrows either becomes merged or else finds its peculiar expression.

"Yes: years passed—those years which so completely altered the mind, the habits, and the personal appearance of the Marquis of Eagledean. At length he resolved to pay a visit to England. He had several reasons for this determination, to which he did not however arrive suddenly and in a moment of eccentricity. He had received many evil accounts concerning his nephew, Lord Harold Staunton, the presumptive heir to his title and estates. These reports had reached him through indirect channels: for Lady

Macdonald, Lord Harold Staunton's aunt, was too indulgent towards her nephew to write any particulars very materially to his prejudice. Therefore the Marquis resolved to visit London and ascertain for himself the truth of those rumours. There was another reason. Lady Macdonald had informed him that his niece, Lady Florina Staunton, was contracted to Lord Saxondale. Now, through the same channels which had conveyed to the Marquis of Eagledean the irregularities of Lord Harold Staunton, intelligence had reached him of a similarly prejudicial character in respect to Lord Saxondale. Here again did he resolve to judge for himself. And last, but not least, he experienced an anxiety to make enquiries concerning the welfare of his children—those children for whom he had made such ample provision. He knew not indeed whether they were alive: he had communicated not with Lord Petersfield—nor with Sir John Marston: the solicitor who prepared the trust-deed, had long been dead;—and many years had elapsed since the Marquis held any communication with those particular bankers in whose hands the money was lodged. It must not be thought that he had ceased to reflect with tenderness upon those children: the truth is, he dared not take any step which should recall too vividly all the incidents of the past. Convinced that he had entrusted their destiny to honourable men, and that the provisions of the deed were so carefully arranged as to ensure their welfare, his mind had been easy upon those points. Yet when he resolved to return to England, the intent of making inquiries concerning his son and daughter naturally entered into his plans. He came to England about two months back; and if he did not instantaneously enter upon these inquiries, it was because it suited his purpose, for several reasons, to maintain a strict *incognito* and pass under the assumed name he had for so many years borne upon the Continent. With that assumed name he did not at first choose to call upon Lord Petersfield; and he therefore postponed that proceeding until he might think fit to resume his rank again. But I can say no more at present——My feelings are overpowering me——You know all!"

With these words Mr. Gunthorpe extended his arms towards Elizabeth and Francis Paton; and they, throwing themselves upon their knees before him, looked up with tearful countenances and ineffable emotions into his face, adown which the tears were likewise falling thick and fast.

"Yes, my dear children," he said in tremulous tones: "I am your father—I am the Marquis of Eagledean!"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

DISCOURSE.

HALF-AN-HOUR, elapsed,—half-an-hour, during which there was poured forth a tide of emotions which no language can depict—a flood of feelings which no pen can describe. They had so much to say to each other—that father, that daughter, and that son, so many questions to ask, so many responses to give, and all interrupted by so many fresh embraces and tenderest caresses! But at the expiration of this interval, they recovered a degree of calmness; and then the Marquis of Eagledean reminded Elizabeth and Frank that they had many subjects for serious deliberation.

"Listen to me attentively, my dear children: for Adolphus may return,—and we must not, at least for the present suffer him to learn all that has been taking place. I must still be known for yet a little while as plain *Mr. Gunthorpe*; and ye must both exercise the most rigid command over your feeling, so as not to betray the degree of relationship in which you stand towards me. Yes—I must continue my *incognito* for the present, until I have seen Lady Everton. With her shall I consult——yes, we shall meet and deliberate as friends——whether Adolphus shall be left in ignorance of the affinity of your two selves unto him. Consider, my children, how difficult and how dangerous is this point, If he be told to regard you, Elizabeth, as a sister—and you, Frank, as a brother—it will be of course necessary to explain to him the history of his mother's family. Perhaps—and it is most probable—indeed it is most natural—that she will implore the secret to be maintained, so that she may not have to blush in the presence of her own son. I shall proceed into Wales alone in the first instance, and obtain an interview with her. It will even be better for Adolphus not to accompany me. I will break to her the circumstance that he is alive——if she herself be indeed ignorant of it. In short, upon my interview with Lady Everton so much depends that my *incognito* must be preserved, and it must not be known that it is the Marquis of Eagledean who is thus visiting her in her retirement. Remember therefore, my dear children, that you treat me for the present as plain Mr. Gunthorpe—as your friend, and not as your father—as your benefactor, working out an eccentric whim which has made him take a fancy to you both, and not as the parent who in due time will ensure your worldly welfare. Now, have you both strength of mind to master your feelings in the presence of others ?"

Elizabeth and Frank both gave the requisite assurances; and the Marquis resumed his discourse.

"The vile and atrocious treatment which you have both received at the hands of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston can be easily accounted for. There can be no doubt that from the very first, those two men came to an understanding with each other; and doubtless also with the full connivance and concurrence of the usurper Everton himself. Indeed, it is no difficult to conceive that Sir John Marston said to that villain Everton, '*Leave me and Petersfield to appropriate to ourselves the fortunes of these children*; *and you on your side play your own game to become possessed of the title and estates properly belonging to Adolphus*.' Then, when you came of age, Elizabeth, a husband bearing a noble name was found for you; and no doubt the document which you signed, and over which the notary spread his blotting-paper, was a general release to your guardians, and an acknowledgment of the receipt of your fortune. On the presentation of that document to the bankers, the money would be paid over to them. In respect to yourself, Frank, there can be no difficulty in reading the mystery. A tale of your death was invented, so that your fortune devolved to your sister; and by virtue of the same deed which she had previously signed—or perhaps by a forgery—your fortune likewise fell into the hands of the villains Petersfield and Marston. Indeed, there must have been forgeries committed,—forgeries of documents to prove your death; and it is but too evident that the schoolmaster at Southampton was well bribed to enter into the plot. That you Elizabeth, should have been led to believe in your brother's death, was likewise necessary to the carrying out of the villanous scheme: for it is clear that Sir John Marston has been all along afraid lest you should by some means or another obtain a clue to the fraud which had been practised towards yourself, and follow it up to detect that which had likewise been perpetrated towards your brother. That when you married the Marquis of Villebelle, Sir John Marston should have stipulated with you both for your immediate severance, was likewise a necessary precaution: for if you had lived together as husband and wife, you would have told Villebelle all the circumstances of your past history—and he would have maintained his right to receive from Sir John Marston a full explanation of the circumstances attending so mysterious a marriage. And that Sir John Marston should the other day have endeavoured to prevent the Marquis of Villebelle from contracting a second marriage, with the Hon. Miss Constance Farefield, is likewise easily explained. For if the bankers learnt that you were alive, while the Marquis contracted this second marriage, they would suspect there had been some foul play in respect to the first: they would demand explanations of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston—they might follow up the clue—and exposure would follow. No wonder indeed was it that Marston should have allowed you four hundred a year, considering the immensity of the fortune he had robbed you of,—considering also his anxiety to prevent you from instituting disagreeable inquiries. But let all that pass. Petersfield and Marston possess the secret of your mother's shame, and they must not be driven through base revenge to drag all the circumstances of the past before the world!"

The Marquis passed; and after a few moments' reflection, he continued his discourse.

"Perhaps you are surprised that I did not reveal myself to you yesterday, Elizabeth, after you unfolded the narrative of your past life: or that I did not tell you who I was ere I commenced my own narrative just now. But it was so much easier for me to develop all the incidents of the past in the form of a mere narrative, than if I had at once thrown off the disguise and spoken of myself in the first person. Yes—it was less painful to tell me the tale as if it were the biography of another, and not mine own! But there was a moment yesterday, Elizabeth, when I was about to breathe the one word which would have told you who I was. It was when you besought me so earnestly to speak that one word ! And it would have been spoken, had not you, Frank, together with Adolphus, returned to the cottage at the time. But now at last you know everything ; and let me hope, my dear children, you do not feel that you ought to blush for the author of your being, because he led your mother into frailty !

Neither Elizabeth nor Frank gave any verbal reply to this question : but a still more eloquent response was afforded by the manner in which they precipitated themselves into their father's arms, bestowing upon him the most endearing caresses.

"This is a happiness" he continued, "which had any one predicted it to me but a few weeks back—or even only a few days—I should not have believed that it was possible. Not but that I anticipated a feeling of delight in meeting my children, if they were still alive and to be found : but I thought not that my own nature remained susceptible of such unalloyed and ineffable bliss. I feared that it was warped by past sorrows—changed by the afflictions of other years—rendered morbid and unhealthy by various eccentricities. I find that it is not so ; and I love you, my dear children—Oh, I love you, with all the gushing effusion which the most youthful father could possibly experience when straining his offspring in his arms !"

There was another long pause ; and when the feelings of the father, the daughter, and the son had subsided into the calmness again, they began to converse relative to Adolphus.

"You have told me, Elizabeth," said the Marquis of Eagledean, "that in accumulating all possible proofs of that villain Everton's guilt, together with the identity of Adolphus as the son of the late General Lord Everton, you had it in view to bring the base usurper to a private and amicable settlement—so that a public scandal, in which her ladyships name might by chance be painfully brought in, should be avoided. You have acted wisely and well. All your proceedings have been marked by the most delicate consideration, and characterized by the soundest judgment. It is now for me to take the work out of your hands. I will repair at once to Beech-Tree Lodge, in the hope of finding Mr. Everton there :—for *Mr. Everton* he assuredly is, and his title of *Lord* is a monstrous usurpation. So soon as Adolphus returns in the carriage, I will repair without delay to the village of Hornsey."

Half-an-hour after this conversation—it being now about one o'clock in the day, and Adolphus having returned—the Marquis of Eagledean proceeded to Beech-Tree Lodge, and asked first of all for Theodore Barclay. This individual proved to be the footman to whom the inquiry was addressed ; and the Marquis hurriedly demanded whether Lord Everton was at the Lodge ? The response given by Barclay was that his master was exceedingly ill and confined to his chamber—that he would see no one, the physician having ordered that he should be kept as quiet as possible.

"Nevertheless, he must see me," said the Marquis, slipping some pieces of gold into Theodore's hand. "I come from Mrs. Chandos."

"Ah !" ejaculated Barclay. I understand. Fortunately Mr. Bellamy is not at home at this moment, and I can take you up to his lordship's room. What name shall I announce ?"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," replied the nobleman. "Be quick : I am desirous of seeing your master at once."

Theodore accordingly led the way up the staircase, and conducted the Marquis of Eagledean to a handsomely furnished bed-chamber on the second storey. Gently opening the door, he said, "My lord, a gentleman—Mr. Gunthorpe—desires most particularly to see you."

"I will see no one," ejaculated a voice from within : but the Marquis of Eagledean entered the room—and Theodore Barclay, closing the door, retreated down stairs.

Everton was seated in an arm-chair, near the bed from which he had only recently risen. His emaciated form was wrapped in a dressing-gown—he looked ghastly pale—the traces of harrowing care and fearful anxiety were plainly visible upon his features—and it was with a mingled angry petulance and affright, that he exclaimed, on beholding the visitor, "What means this intrusion ? who are you ? what do you want ?"

"Tranquillize yourself as well as you can," said the Marquis, deliberately taking a chair opposite the one in which Everton was seated : "for we have business of importance to discuss."

"But who are you ?" again demanded the sick man : and he gazed with increasing apprehension upon this visitor, who appeared so determined to maintain his position in the chamber.

"You have heard my name announced," replied the Marquis : "is it unfamiliar to you ?"

"Gunthorpe ? I do not know it. Who are you ? Why don't you speak out plainly at once ? You see that I am ill—that I cannot bear excitement——"

"The name of Gunthorpe is then unknown to you ?" said the Marquis, "Am I to conclude that neither Lord Petersfield nor Sir John Marston have acquainted you with the interview that took place between them and me the day before yesterday ?"

As Lord Eagledean mentioned those names, a still more ghastly expression gathered upon the countenance of the wretched invalid, mingled with a still more agonized affright. He gazed wistfully and with feverish anxiety upon the Marquis, as if to study the lineaments of his countenance, or read therein the exact purport of his visit; but it was evident enough that he did not recognize Lord Eagledean—so changed indeed was the personal appearance of this nobleman from what it was when he and Everton had last met, more than sixteen years back !

"I will once set your mind at rest," said the Marquis, "so far as I am enabled to do so—and far more perhaps, than you deserve. All your guilt is known——"

"My guilt ?" echoed the invalid : and his emaciated form quivered with a cold conclusive spasm. "But you spoke of Petersfield and Marston——"

"And I have likewise," added Lord Eagledean, solemnly, "to speak of your nephew Adolphus—the rightful heir to the estates and title which you have usurped !"

"It is false—all false !" cried the old man vehemently : "he is a pretender—an impostor. Adolphus died and was buried——"

"Silence !" interrupted the Marquis sternly ; "persist not in those foul falsehoods. But hear me. I come to offer you the means of settling all these matters peaceably—, tranquilly——I cannot use the word amicably——but, I may say, with as little scandal and as little exposure as may be possible under the circumstances. Now, will you make this reparation ? will you make this atonement ? or will you dare the vengeance of the law ?"

"But who are you ? again inquired the miserable old man, looking aghast—a most abject picture of physical decay and moral ignominy.

"I am one possessing sufficient knowledge of the past to drag all your crimes to light, if you force me to that alternative. But I do not seek it : I have already given you this assurance. If with that palsied hand of your's," continued the Marquis solemnly, "you persist in clutching the coronet which you plucked from the brow of its rightful possessor, you will speedily exchange this well-furnished apartment for a felon's dungeon. Listen to me—do not interrupt me : those passionate ejaculations of your's will produce no effect—unless indeed it be an effect detrimental to yourself. You spoke ere now of the death of Adolphus—his burial——I tell you that it was a monstrous deceit—a detestable imposture : for Adolphus is living—you know that he has escaped from this vile den of yours ; and I must tell you that he has found friends——"

"I understand it all," exclaimed Everton, regaining a portion of his lost effrontery. "That crazy young man—a rampant lunatic—has by some means or another got the idea into his head that he is the Adolphus of whom you speak. No doubt there are base and mercenary petti-foggers to be found ready and eager to take up his cause. Perhaps you yourself are the attorney who may have got it in hand ? Come, sir—we begin to understand each other ; name your price—I don't want law—I am too ill to be troubled with litigation——"

"And this illness of yours," interrupted the Marquis of Eagledean indignantly, "has doubtless been brought on by the goading tortures of your evil conscience. No, sir—I am *not* an attorney : nor have I the selfish purposes of a detestable rapacity to serve. Besides, have you forgotten the allusion I have made to Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston ? and can you not understand that your iniquity in respect to your nephew Adolphus, is not the only villany of your's with which I am acquainted ? Was it not by your consent and connivance, that those two men—as base as yourself—appropriated the immense fortune——"

"But I was no party to that trust-deed!" ejaculated the miserable invalid again trembling all over from head to foot. "My name was not mentioned in it—I had naught to do with the transaction. If Petersfield and Marston have abused their trust, I am not responsible."

"No—you are not responsible legally: but you are morally," replied Lord Eagledean. "On that subject I do not however wish to dwell at present——"

"But who are you? I suppose you are an agent or friend of some one in Italy——"

"Yes: the Marquis of Eagledean. I am his friend," responded the visitor, curtly and drily.

"The Marquis of Eagledean was a villain," exclaimed the invalid,—"the seducer of my sister; and I spared *him* —I spared *her* likewise! I kept their secret religiously—faithfully——"

"Yes—to serve your own purposes. Ah! Mr. Everton——"

"How dare you address me thus? I am Lord Everton—and you cannot disprove my rights. This fabrication in respect to a crack-brained pretender, will not hold good for a moment. Come, sir —tell me who you are, and what you want?"

"Yes: I will tell you what I want in a few words," rejoined the Marquis. "I demand a full confession of your iniquity towards your nephew, and the acknowledgment of his identity. But stop—do not interrupt me! Let me tell you at once that I have obtained proof of which perhaps you little dream——"

"Proofs?" ejaculated the invalid endeavouring to assume a tone and look of defiance, but in reality convulsing and writhing in his chair with the tortures of an agonizing suspense.

"Yes—proofs! Upwards of sixteen years ago," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, speaking in a low and solemn voice, "the corpse of a pauper boy, who died in a workhouse, was disinterred from the grave—was removed to Everton Park—and on the same night, Adolphus was brought hither: from which moment he has been kept in a cruel captivity until his providential release a short time ago."

The invalid gave a low moan and sank back in the chair like one annihilated. His eyes became glassy, as if glazing beneath the touch of death, while he stared in vacant dismay upon Lord Eagledean. This nobleman, fearing that the wretched man was about to give up the ghost, sprang from his seat, and was rushing towards the bell to summon assistance, when Everton cried out, in a half-shrieking, half-imploring voice, "No, no! let no one come! I will do whatever you command—I am in your power—I am at your mercy!"

The Marquis of Eagledean resumed his seat: and the invalid, experiencing a sense of faintness, pointed towards a bottle upon the table, murmuring, "I beseech you—give me some of that cordial."

This request was immediately complied with; and the invigorating, or we should rather say stimulating effect of the liquor was quickly apparent on the part of the invalid. A slight flush, but of a hectic appearance, sprang up on his cheeks, as if painting the ghastliness of death: and his eyes shone with an unnatural lustre.

"I see that you know all," he said, in a low and gloomy voice—and yet he trembled with excitement. "What do you require of me? I have been betrayed —some villain has revealed the secrets of the past—"

"No matter how they came to my knowledge," interrupted the Marquis: "it is for you to make speedy reparation and atonement. A written acknowledgment, signed by your own hand, to the effect that Adolphus is your nephew— the legitimate possessor of the title and estates of Everton—that the tale of his death was false——"

"But if I do all this," said the miserable man, "it will consign me to a dungeon—it will subject me to terrible penalties——"

"Which you richly deserve—but which shall be spared you. No: horrible and unnatural—perfidious and execrable, though your conduct has been, no vindictive feeling shall pursue you. You will sign the needful paper to put Adolphus in possession of his rights: but before any use shall be made of that document, you may fly to the Continent—there to linger out the rest of your existence. Some forms and ceremonies will have to be observed in the House of Lords to substantiate the claims of Adolphus; and it will therefore be impossible for the history of your guilt to be altogether saved from publicity. But its consequences you may escape by self-expatriation; and I know the members of the British Aristocracy well enough," added the Marquis of Eagledean with a scornful sneer, "to be assured that the Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords will not suffer more of the details of your guilt to ooze out to the public knowledge, than they can possibly help. They at least have the merit of shielding to the extent of their power the crimes of any one of their own order, lest the effects of the scandal should redound upon them all!"

"But this paper—this document," said the invalid, quivering nervously,—"who is to draw it up? when is it to be signed?"

"I will draw it up at once—and you shall sign it now," was the response of the Marquis. "Rest assured I shall be found a competent witness, when the time comes, to present the papers before the Committee of Privileges. At all events, that is our affair—not your's. Where shall I find writing-materials?"

The invalid pointed to a desk which stood upon a side-table: the Marquis proceeded thither—opened the desk—sat down and began to write. For about a quarter of an hour did he thus remain occupied, during which interval the thoughts of Mr. Everton were of such a harrowing anguished description that they were almost a sufficient punishment for the tremendous iniquities which had stained his past career. When Lord Eagledean had finished drawing up the deed, which embodied a general confession of Everton's proceedings in respect to his nephew, he read it slowly and deliberately over to that person: then handing him the pen, he bade him sign it.

"Is it absolutely necessary?" asked the invalid, gazing up with appealing earnestness into Lord Eagledean's countenance: "can no mercy be shown me? May I not at least retain my rank until death makes its appearance? Consider, Mr. Gunthorpe,—or whoever you may be, for methinks you are more than what you seem—consider, I beseech and implore you—I am not long for this world. I feel as if the hand of death were already upon me. At the outside I cannot live many months—perhaps not many weeks: my days are doubtless numbered—I have experienced a shock, caused by the deliverance of that young man——But, Oh! reflect, I conjure you—may not some mercy be shown me?—for I spared *his* life!"

"Mr. Everton," interrupted the Marquis sternly, "to what a pitiable condition must you be reduced—to what an abysm of moral degradation are you fallen—when you have to congratulate yourself that you had not the courage to become a murderer? Do you not see, sir, that the hand of Providence was in all this? You were villain enough to play the part of usurper—you would deprive your nephew of his just rights—you could for years retain him in a miserable captivity, treating him as a lunatic until you almost made him one—you could snatch him away from his mother—you could mercilessly separate the parent from her son: all this were you villain enough to do—but you lacked the boldness to strike the blow effectually! Do not think for a moment, sir, that I believe it was through any merciful consideration on your part that you spared your nephew's life. No: I understand your character full well. With all your iniquity you were a coward; and it was heaven's will that this cowardice on your part should become the means of saving you from a still darker crime than any you have perpetrated. Take no credit to yourself that you are not a murderer: you possessed the will, but you lacked the courage. And now, sir, without farther entreaty on your part—without farther hesitation—sign this paper!"

The invalid—overawed, dismayed, and crushed by the withering language addressed to him by one who spoke with the authority of an avenger, and yet an avenger who was showing mercy—the invalid, we say, took the pen in his trembling hand, and prepared to sign. But he laid it down, and requested that another glass of the cordial might be given to him. This desire was promptly fulfilled; and under the influence of the stimulant he affixed his name to the foot of the document, in a firmer hand than could have been anticipated.

"Now, sir," observed Lord Eagledean, consigning the paper to his pocket-book, and taking up his hat, "I have little more to say. The promise I have given you shall be kept. No use shall be made of this document until I learn that you are safe upon the Continent. Nor am I so cruel and inhuman as to wish that you precipitate your departure in a manner that may endanger your life. Perhaps now that you have made this atonement—now that you are acquainted with all the worst that is to befall you, and that your mind must be relieved from the most torturing apprehension as to the course which Adolphus might have adopted in making good his claims—you may recover some degree of mental tranquility, which will assist you towards convalescence. Your departure need not be prejudicially hurried : but it must not be inordinately prolonged. And one word more. If, when Adolphus assumes possession of his ancestral estates, you yourself are reduced to poverty, a sufficient provision shall be made for the remainder of your life : and thus, sir, must you feel that much good is being returned for an immensity of evil—and that you are treated with that mercy which you never extended to others ! "

With these words the Marquis of Eagledean took his departure ; and descending the stairs, he was about to enter his carriage, when Theodore Barclay, approaching him, said, " Mr. Gunthorpe, does my master know that I have given any information concerning him ? "

" No : but he may possibly suspect it. You would do well to leave his service at once. Here is my card ; you can call upon me a fortnight hence—when something shall be done for you."

The footman expressed his thanks ; and the Marquis of Eagledean was whirled away from Beech-Tree Lodge towards Stamford Manor.

On reaching his house, he found Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank walking together in the font gardens. Immediately joining them, he related what had taken place between himself and Mr. Everton : for to the grade of a civilian had the usurper sunk down again, being divested of his noble rank. The Marquis displayed the document which he had compelled that individal to sign, but to which he had not as yet appended his own attesting signature. He then represented to Adolphus his intention of departing on the ensuing morning for Wales, in order to obtain an interview with Lady Everton.

" You must permit me, my dear friend," he said to Adolphus, " to manage the whole of this business after my own fashion. For several reasons, which I cannot now explain, it is better that you should not accompany me. But rest assured that the shortest possible delay shall be allowed to elapse ere you are permitted to fold your mother in your arms. Perhaps she may accompany me back to London—or perhaps I may send off a messenger to require your immediate presence in Wales : I know not as yet how all this may be. But tell me, are you satisfied to leave it to my management ? "

" Oh ! my dear sir—my excellent friend," exclaimed Adolphus, pressing with effusion the hand of the Marquis, " how could I be otherwise ? "

In the evening the Marquis gave instructions to the dependants of his household that during his absence they were to regard Miss Paton as their mistress, and obey her instructions in all things. Retiring to his library, he wrote a few letters—one of which was to William Deveril, to the effect that urgent business would take him out of town for a short time : but he promised that he should return in time for that day on which our young hero had been promised a visit from the mysterious woman whom he had saved from drowning in the waters of the Trent.

On the following morning, having taken an affectionate leave of Elizabeth, Frank, and Adolphus, the Marquis of Eagledean set out upon his journey into Radnorshire.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE MYSTERIOUS MISSIVE .

IT was the forenoon of the day after the Marquis of Eagledean's departure from Stamford Manor, that Elizabeth and Frank, having accompanied Adolphus in a walk as far as Mrs. Leydon's cottage, left him there to pass an hour or two with Henrietta and then continued their own ramble with the intention of calling for him on their way home.

Elizabeth leant upon her brother's arm : she was elegantly dressed—he was handsomely apparelled—and it was a pleasing spectacle to behold that superb young woman and that beautiful youth thus linked together in the firmest bonds of fraternal affection. Elizabeth wore her raven hair in massive bands which served as an ebon frame for her high and expansive forehead ; while an exquisite French bonnet subdued the natural boldness of her features and gave to her looks a certain air of feminine delicacy. Frank,—who, as the reader will remember, had been somewhat indisposed after he first left Lady Saxondale's service,—was now perfectly restored to health ; and though he had never much colour upon his cheeks, yet whatsoever bloom was wont to rest thereon had come back again, appearing like the delicate vermeil upon the downy surface of the ripening peach. A tight-fitting frock coat set off the lithe and slender symmetry of his form to the utmost advantage : while in respect to his sister, the dress that she wore, developed, although concealing, the noble proportions of her richly modelled shape. Thus altogether they were a couple—that brother and sister—whom it was impossible to gaze upon without a feeling of interest ; and they felt proud of each other. For Frank saw that his sister was a superb woman while she being so much older than himself, experienced an almost maternal satisfaction and pride in contemplating that beautiful youth who bore the endearing name of brother.

"How changed, my dear Frank" she said, as they rambled along together, "are the circumstances of our position. Does it not all appear like a dream ?"

"There have been moments," answered Frank, "when I have hesitated to believe that it was all a reality. Yesterday morning—and this morning too—when first awakening, I sat up in the bed, looking around the splendidly furnished chamber, and wondering whether I indeed saw it with my outward vision, or whether it was a delusion of the fancy. Yes : extraordinary things have taken place within the last few weeks ! But the condition of Adolopus has experienced a change as remarkable as our own."

"And is he not happy now ?" said Elizabeth ; "how devotedly he appears to love that sweet and amiable girl Henrietta ! But methought you sighed, Frank ?" exclaimed his sister ; and stopping suddenly short in the road where they were walking at the time, she gazed attentively upon him. "Ah ! my dear brother ! the colour mantals upon your cheeks——you have a secret which has been kept back from me ?"

"Foregive me, dearest Elizabeth—forgive me," said the youth murmuringly, "It is true—it is true—and I have been wrong to keep that secret from you."

"I do not demand your confidence, Frank," observed Elizabeth, as she slowly walked on again leaning on her brother's arm : "but if you think fit to give it to me, I will bestow either counsel or spmyathy in return."

"I know not," resumed Frank, with half-averted countenance and downcast looks, "whether it is really love which I experience——and yet methinks it must be——But it has been sensuously guilty : and——"

"But its object ?" said Elizabeth inquiringly, seeing that her brother stopped suddenly short.

"Juliana Farefield," was the response.

"Ah, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter ! But if you really love her, Frank, you may aspire to her hand ; there is no need for you to be disconsolate," continued his sister : "on the return of our father, you must tell him everything. And yet, my dear brother," she added, speaking more slowly and gravely, "there is this consideration—that if Juliana Farefield beguiled you into becoming the object of a sensual phantasy, she is a being unworthy of a pure affection on your part, because she herself experiences it not towards you."

Francis Paton, recovering from his confusion, proceeded to acquaint his sister, candidly but delicately, with all that had taken place between himself and Juliana. Elizabeth listened in silence —and continued to reflect in silence also, after he had done speaking.

"You tell me that Miss Farefield manifested a deep interest in the tale of your earlier years," she at length said,—"that she treated you with the kindest sympathy—that she expressed the conviction your birth was above the circumstances in which you were then placed. All this seems to argue in favour of a true and sincere love on her part. And yet, could she not have suggested a private marriage ? Not being acquainted with her, and therefore being utterly unable to form a correct estimate of her true character and disposition, I know not what to say, or what to advise. She is exceedingly handsome, Frank—is she not ?"

"Oh, she is superbly beautiful !" cried the youth in enthusiastic tones : and again did the colour glow upon his cheeks.

"I know not what love is," said Elizabeth ; "but I think that I can conjecture the symptoms and principles of the passion. Look into your own heart, Frank: does it cherish Juliana's image? are you frequently—almost constantly thinking of her? Yes, yes—I know that you are! Those abstracted moods which I have so often observed since we were thrown together again, have not been altogether fraught with pain and grief on my account. Doubtless you have sorrowed at being separated from Juliana? your heart has yearned towards her?"

"Yes—for I feel that I love her." replied Frank. "But do you think, dear Elizabeth, that there is any hope of the proud and haughty Lady Saxondale permitting her daughter to wed a youth who once wore a livery in her service?"

"The Maruquis of Eagledean," responded Elizabeth proudly, will give you a fortune, Frank, that will be sufficient to over-rule Lady Saxondale's scruples. Yes—if he cannot give you a noble name, he will at least give you wealth;—and wealth in this country constitutes a social position. Besides, Juliana is not more likely to be swayed by her mother's will, than Constance herself was. But, ah! now that I reflect—from certain words which our father let drop when he was having a private conversation with me the day before yesterday on the eve of his departure, I gleaned that he entertains no pleasant feeling towards Lady Saxondale. He believes that his nephew Harold Staunton is her ladyship's paramour, and that at her instigation he has done some very bad deeds. However, we must wait till the return of the Marquis ere we can decide upon any step to be taken by yourself in respect to Juliana. Do not be discouraged, dear Frank, by what I have just been saying in respect to Lady Saxondale. Although we have known our dear father but for a few days, we have nevertheless seen enough of him, and likewise experienced ample proofs, to convince us that he will in all things study the happiness of each of us. During the interval that he will retain absent, it is for you to look deeply into her heart—to assure yourself that this is a sincere and permanent affection which you entertain for Miss Farefield; and if you come to the conclusion that the felicity of your life is centred in her, I have no doubt our father will make such measures as shall crown your most fervid aspirations."

"Dearest sister, I thank you—Oh, I thank you for these assurances!" exclaimed Frank. "How rejoiced I am that I have at length revealed my secret to you! Often and often have I been on the point of confessing it. It has wavered upon my lips:—and then I have felt an indescribable confusion—a bashfulness—an apprehension——"

"I understand you, my dear brother," replied Miss Paton with an affectionate look.

"But you, Elizabeth, quickly rejoined Frank,—"is it really possible that *you* have never experienced even the most transient sentiment which might be deemed bordering upon love?"

"Never, Frank! Perhaps, you cannot comprehend such a heart as mine: and yet, as I have before told you, it has hitherto escaped even the faintest impression of a tender character."

"I have often seen the Marquis of Villebelie," said Frank: "he is very handsome—possesses a highly intellectual countenance, and fascinating manners. Do you not think, Elizabeth, that if you had lived with him as your husband—if the circumstances of that marriage had not at the time inspired you with an aversion for an alliance that ought only to have been connected with a heart's best and purest affections,—do you not think, I say, that you would have been learnt to love that handsome and elegant nobleman?"

"I do not think so, Frank," responded his sister, smiling. "No. My belief is that when a woman first meets the man whom she is destined to love, she experiences some unknown and intuitive feeling which at once points him out as the being who is to exercise a paramount influence over the future years of her life. Such was not the case when I first set eyes upon the Marquis of Villebelle."

"No—because the circumstances were so peculiar," exclaimed Frank: "he appeared before you to the utmost disadvantage, and in a position but little calculated to command either respect or esteem. Had it been otherwise—were you introduced to him in the ordinary manner, meeting him in society and gradually becoming the object of his attentions,—you know not, my dear sistet, what would have been the result. And then—there was Count Christoval! You have told me that he was one of the handsomest men you ever beheld in all your life, and that he poesessed every intellectual embellishment to aid the advantages of personal beauty——"

"You seem very anxious, my dear Frank," interrupted Elizabeth, laughing gaily, "that I should confess to having been at some time of my life smitten with the sentiment of love."

"Ah, my dear sister," responded the youth; "if you had been, it would now prove so sweet to me to converse with you thereon."

"The heart that loves, then," said Elizabeth, now speaking seriously, "longs to pour forth its thoughts and feelings to another heart beating with kindred emotions? Yes—I am convinced, Frank, from all you have been saying, that you do love Juliana Farefield! Your words convey all the evidences of that affection. But with regard to myself, I can only repeat what I have already told you—that if my soul be ever destined to receive the impression of love, I have not as yet encountered in the world the object who is to inspire the feeling. We were talking of Don Diego Christoval. Remember the many months that I passed in his society—the delicate attentions that he showed me—the mingled vehemence and pathos with which he urged his suit,—and yet I experienced not for him the slightest feeling of love. No: the Count, although so handsome, so fascinating, so intellectual—and although surrounded by so many circumstances of a wildly romantic character but too well calculated to make an impression on a susceptible heart,—yet *he* was not the individual destined to ensnare mine!"

"Then will you never marry, Elizabeth?" asked Frank, bending his ingenuous looks upon his sister.

"Never," she at once responded,—"unless I learn to love tenderly and well. But while thus discoursing, my dear brother," she said, stopping short "we have been wandering to a greater distance than we at first intended. Ah! what is this?"

The ejaculation that Elizabeth Paton thus suddenly gave forth, was produced by the circumstance of a beautiful carrier-pigeon suddenly descending from the higher regions of the air, and circling three or four times over the spot where she and her brother had halted. The intelligent bird actually appeared to be examining Elizabeth, to assure itself that she was the kind mistress whose hand had been wont to feed it and in whose bosom it had often nestled. Each circle that it made became narrower and also lower: till, at the expiration of a few moments, it perched upon her shoulder.

"It is one of my own pigeons," she exclaimed,—"one of those that I sent back to Kate Marshall!"—then, as she took the bird in her hands and began caressing it, she said, "It bears a letter. Ah! can I, without a breach of our father's wishes, read its contents? He evidently desired that I should break off all farther correspondence with the Marshalls—and he was right too!"

"Nevertheless," suggested Frank, "there will be no harm in seeing what the billet contains. It may be of importance—and there is no necessity for you to answer it unless circumstances demand a reply."

"We will read it," Elizabeth: and she accordingly proceeded to unfasten the little note from beneath the bird's wing.

The moment this was done, the feathered messenger ascended into the air, as if knowing that its mission was accomplished—and was soon out of sight.

"Doubtless that intelligent little creature," said Elizabeth, still hesitating whether to open the letter, "has been to the cottage—and not finding me there, went forth in search of its well-known mistress. But as you have suggested, there will be no harm in seeing what Kate says."

She accordingly opened the billet, the contents of which were in Miss Marshall's handwriting. The ambiguous arrangement of the letters of the alphabet was not observed on this occasion: for Kate no doubt had fancied that as her friend Lady Bess wrote so positively to declare that she thenceforth dispensed with the service of the carrier-pigeons, she had destroyed the cypher-book for the current year, which indicated the initial letter for each respective day. The note contained the following lines:—

Dover, August 4, 1844.

"I am rejoiced, my dear friend, that circumstances have so changed with you as to render your future prospects of the brightest character. I know not whether this little missive will reach you: but I risk it. Indeed, I cannot refrain from the endeavour to convey a piece of information which nearly concerns you. A certain person arrived at Dover yesterday, and staid a few hours at our house. His name being known to me, I spoke to him, and found that he has come to

England in search of you. You can guess to whom I allude, as I dare not enter into particulars, for fear this note should fall into other hands than yours.

"Your affectionate friend,
C. M."

"To whom can she allude?" ejaculated Frank, he having read this note simultaneously with his sister.

"I cannot conceive," observed the latter thoughtfully. "Surely—— But no: it is scarcely possible! At all events, the note requires not an answer—and I am glad of it; for though I never can forget the kindnesses I have received from the Marshalls, yet in obedience to our father's wishes, all correspondence must henceforth cease between them and me. Come, Frank—let us hasten back to Mrs. Leyden's house: Adolphus will wonder what has become of us."

The brother and sister accordingly repaired thither, and found Adolphus walking with Henrietta in the immediate vicinage of the dwelling. After Elizabeth and Frank had rested a little while at the cottage, they continued their way, in company with Adolphus, towards Stamford Manor.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening, that Elizabeth Paton rambled forth alone in the grounds attached to the mansion,—Frank and Adolphus remaining indoors. She was pondering upon the conversation that had taken place in the morning between her brother and herself, and deliberating in her own mind upon the probable course that their father would recommend with respect to Frank's passion for Juliana Farefield. She was likewise reflecting, in its turn upon the mysterious letters she had received from Kate Marshall. In this meditative mood she reached the plaisade that skirted the grounds, and on the opposite side of which there was a road. All of a sudden an ejaculation of enthusiastic joy fell upon her ears, startling her from her reverie. She raised her eyes: with a single bound an individual sprang over the palisade, and alighted in her presence, his countenance beaming with rapture.

Yes—the suspicion which had at first struck Elizabeth Paton on reading Miss Marshall's letter, was now suddenly confirmed: it was Don Diego Christoval who stood before her!

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE SPANIARD.

COUNT CHRISTOVAL was now thirty five years of age; and though somewhat careworn, yet in other respects his countenance was a prepossessing as on the first day when Elizabeth Paton met him amongst the Catalan hills. He wore his moustache—but his beard and whiskers were closely shaven; and their absence made him seen several years younger than he really was. His dark eyes shone perhaps with a more subdued and melancholy lustre than was their wont ere he had learnt to love the English Lady: but now, as she gazed upon her, they beamed with the light of rapturous joy. The brilliant teeth shone between the half-parting lips; and in this moment of his ineffable delight, the rich warm blood of his trans-Pyrenean nature was mantling through the transparent olive of his complexion. He was dressed as a private gentleman; his apparel was handsome, yet in the best possible taste; and the closely fitting frock-coat displayed the fine symmetry of his tall form to its fullest advantage.

Elizabeth Paton quickly recovered from the startled surprise into which the sudden appearance of Don Diego had thrown her; and with the natural generosity of her heart, she chose to lose sight of the forced prisonage she had endured at his hands, and to think only of the kindness and attention received from himself and his associates in the Catalan hills. But while she extended her hand, she nevertheless assumed a certain degree of reserve in gentle rebuke for the unceremonious manner in which he had burst into her presence. Yet it must be confessed that her mien was not exceedingly reproachful—because strong-minded though she were, she was nevertheless sufficiently a woman to feel that his conduct was most flattering to herself.

Addressing him in the French language, she said, "Don Diego, what brings you to England?"

"Your image!" he replied in the English tongue, at the same time carrying her hand to his lips; and kissing it rapturously ere she could withdraw it, he said, "That image which has never once been absent from my mind since you fled from the tower in the wilds of Catalonia !"

Elizabeth gazed upon him with the utmost astonishment : for he was addressing her in the English language,—spoken too with the utmost accuracy and with but so little of a foreign accent that it was barely perceptible. She knew at the time when she was in Spain he was utterly unacquainted with her native tongue ; and she naturally marvelled to perceive that he had acquired it to such perfection.

I have learnt the English language for your sake," he said, with a deep tenderness of voice and a corresponding look—but both alike mingled with a chivalrous respect, just as he was wont to deport himself towards her during her captivity in Catalonia. And you asked me wherefore I came to England ?" he continued : " need you have put that question ? But let me put a question to you—and I beseech and implore you to respond to it at once. Have you ever thought of me with kindness since you fled from Spain?"

" I have thought of you with friendship," replied Elizabeth Paton, seriously but frankly ; " and within the last few days, when relating my adventures in Catalonia, I have spoken of you in similar terms."

" Friendship !" murmured Count Christoval mournfully : but with a sudden access of hopefulness, he exclaimed, " You may not friendship prove the germ of a more tender feeling ? I know you are not married—I have every reason to believe that you do not love another—— Indeed, I have been assured that you pride yourself on being unsusceptible of love. O Elizabeth ! so bright and beautiful a creature as you—to possess a heart that is unsusceptible of love ! No, no—it were impossible ! it were an anomaly in human nature !—and I am not without the hope that destiny has reserved for me the happiness of thawing that glacial soul of your's !"

" Don Diego Christoval," answered Elizabeth, still speaking seriously, but with a certain degree of kindness in her accents, as well as with the fullest candour in her looks, " it is my firm belief that I never can regard you with any other sentiment than that of friendship. And now, I appeal to the generosity of your nature, and to every feeling of delicacy which must harbour in such a heart as your's, that you will leave me at once. You mansion where I dwell, is the house of a benefactor—and I dare not stand the chance of suffering in his estimation. He is absent too, at this moment : but my brother is there—and a very dear friend also—there are numerous servants likewise—I am well known in this neighbourhood—— In short every instant that you remain here threatens to compromise me most seriously. What would be thought if I were seen walking here with a stranger ?"

" A stranger to those whom you have named," rejoined the Count reproachfully,—" but no stranger to *you* ! Will you not accord me a few minutes. —only a few minutes,—while I tell you all that I have thought—all that I have done—and all that I hoped, during the four years which have elapsed since last I saw you ?"

" Well, then—a few minutes," answered Elizabeth : " and only a few minutes," she added impressively ; " because I must not be compromised.

" Oh ! this coldness—this coldness !" ejaculated the Count vehemently ;— " after I have told you that I came to England expressly to search after you ! It is more than I can endure ! Have pity upon me, Elizabeth—I beseech you to have pity upon me !—for never in this world was a woman the object of a love so devoted as that which my heart cherishes for you. Love ! it is a passion transcending far all that poets ever dreamt or romancists ever depicted in the form of love ! it is a passion which has become so inverwoven with the very principles of my existence, that if it be doomed to prolonged disappointment, it will drive me to put an end to my sorrows and perish in the blood of a distracted suicide !"

The Count spoke with a wild impetuosity, mingled with a solemn earnestness, that for the moment overawed Elizabeth Paton, and even made her afraid. Not afraid for herself—for she was a woman who scarcely knew the name of fear ; and there was no Catalonian tower at hand to which she might be conveyed, and where she might be retained captive. But she was afraid on account of that man who loved her with an ardour so indubitable—a depth of passion so sincere—and a constancy so well proven, that she felt this menace of suicide to be no idle nor inconsiderate one.

" Count Christoval," she said, giving him her hand—speaking kindly, but with a half-reproachful look,—"it is not generous of you to address me in these terms. Much as I may pity you—deeply as I may compassionate you—and even flattered and honoured as I may feel by this love of your's—yet a woman's heart is not to be won by passionate threats and impetuous outpourings."

"No! but her heart is to be won by a devoted love," exclaimed the Count: "and all that I say—all that I do—all that I menace, must be taken as evidences of that devoted love on my part. Listen to me—I beseech you to listen! You have promised to accord me a few minutes—and I will endeavour to be calm."

"Proceed," said Elizabeth, withdrawing her hand, which he had pressed tenderly and fervidly between both his own. "Let us not linger near this road where passers-by might chance to observes us: we will walk through that shady avenue, where we shall be unperceived from the mansion. You see, Count Christoval, that I am compelled to take precautions,—that I am fearful of being compromised; and I hope therefore you will have some consideration for me."

"Will you have any for me, Elizabeth?" he asked, gazing upon her countenance with a rapture subdued by mournful suspense. "But let me avail myself of the little leisure you are affording me. I will go back to that time when you fled from the tower in Catalonia. On discovering your flight, a frenzy seized upon my brain; for several hours I was like one demented. It appeared to me as if the world contained naught left that was worth living for: and yet, as heaven is my witness, I took no measures to pursue you, or to bring you back. I had hoped that by my unwearied attentions I should have secured your affections. Your flight was a proof that my fondest anticipations had all been in vain. When I recovered some degree of calmness, it was only to fall into a profound melancholy; and there were moments, during the latter part of that day on which your flight was discovered, when I thought of putting a period to my excistence. But the circumstances in which my faithful associates were placed, recalled me to immediate activity. I was reminded that the hour had come when I was to learn the result of the negotiations in respect to the captive son of the military commandant of Catalonia. Those terms were fovourable: a ransom-money was paid for his release—and immunity was granted to myself and my band for the ensuing three months. But such a change had come over me that I resolved to abandon immediately the life I was leading. I thought to myself that if I were to follow you to England, whither I felt assured you would repair, I might yet succeed in making an impression upon your heart. I thought that when you were free, and no longer regarded me in the light of a gaoler, you would forget whatsoever injustice you had sustained at my hands: while, on the other hand, you would remember the many proofs of devoted love that I had given you. I took leave of my comrades—I abandoned to them the greater share of the spoils which we had amassed: and they wept as they gave me the farewell embrace. I set out alone towards the Pyrenees, intending to follow you to England. But I had not journeyed many miles, when I was seized with a sudden illness, brought on by the anguish I had suffered on account of your flight. It struck me like a thunderbolt. I fell from my horse, and lay senseless in the depth of a ravine. There I might have perished, had it not been for the kindness of some peasants who chanced to pass that way. They took me to their cottage in the neighbouring hamlet: and there I lay, raving in the delirium of fever for many weeks. When I regained complete consciousness, I was so enfeebled—so attenuated, that I could not leave my couch: and thus some more weeks passed, while I lay stretched prostrate and powerless there. One morning a party of soldiers entered the village; and their commanding officer billetted them upon the inhabitants. This officer was the Captain General's son, whom I had taken prisoner, and whom you saw at the tower. On going his rounds to see that his men were properly cared for, he came to the cottage where I lay, I was recognised: the three months of safety guaranteed by his father, had more than elapsed—and I was accordingly arrested as a Carlist traitor and as a guerilla bandit. But the young man possessed certain generous feelings; and he did not send me out to be shot like a dog, as he might have done, and as most other of the Christino officers would have done in his place. He forwarded me as a prisoner to Barcelona,—at the same time despatching a letter to his father, the Captain-General, beseeching that my life might be spared. This entreaty was not without its effect: but I was sent along with several other Carlist captives to the prison of Cadiz —there to remain until a ship should be in readiness to bear us as felon-exiles to the Phillipine Islands. But it happened that the Governor of Cadiz was a relation of mine: he took compassion on me—and though I myself would ask no favour from the government of Queen Christina's Regency, he adopted measures secretly to procure a mitigation of my sentence. He succeeded—and I was ordered to be retained a prisoner at Cadiz. The same favour was shown to other officers of the Carlist army, who were my fellow captives. We were treated with much indulgence; and being allowed books, I obtained the means of acquiring the English language. Amongst my fellow-prisoners was an English officer who had served in the Carlist army; and after a while he became my tutor in the study of your native tongue. For, Oh! I was not without the hope of sooner or later recovering my liberty: and I thought—heaven grant that the idea was not vain!—I thought, Elizabeth, that if I could address to you the language of love in those tones and words most familiar to your ear, an impression would be more easily made upon your heart. Am I doomed to be mistaken?"

"Proceed with your narrative, Don Diego," said Elizabeth, in a tone which was slightly tremulous. "Remember that the minutes are speeding by."

"Ah! cruel to remind me that you have limited our present interview to so short a space!" exclaimed Count Christoval,—"I who for years have sustained life by dwelling upon your image! But I will continue. Three years elapsed—and I continued a prisoner at Cadiz. My assiduities in acquiring the English language were unremitting; I had an able tutor—and you may judge whether I made the most of my time, and whether I profited by his lessons. In the summer of 1843 all Spain was convulsed by the civil war raised by Queen Christina's adherents against the Regent Espartero; and in a battle which took place, an uncle of mine—a devoted adherent of Christina—was slain. He died, leaving behind him immense wealth, to which I should have been the legitimate heir, were it not that all I possessed devolved to the Crown, as I was a condemned traitor and an outlaw. Then was it that the kind feeling of the Governor of Cadiz again made itself apparent; and when Spain once more became comparatively tranquillized, he exerted all possible interest on my behalf. But matters of this kind drag themselves slowly along in my native country: and it was only a few weeks back that one morning my generous and well-meaning relative brought me the announcement that I had received a full pardon—that my title of Count was restored to me—and that I was allowed to take possession of the large fortune whereof I have spoken. I myself would have asked no favour of those in power: but I was not insane enough to reject the boons which had thus been secretly procured for me. Besides, during my long imprisonment at Cadiz, I had learnt sufficient of the true character of Don Carlos—I had heard so much from my fellow-captives respecting his bigotry, his selfishness, and his narrow mindedness—that I came to loathe the cause which I had formerly served. But while having been brought to this abhorrence of Carlism, I was not changed into an admirer of the Queen's monarchy. My studies had converted me into a Republican; and on the day that I issued from the prison at Cadiz, I vowed that never again would I draw my sword on behalf of Royalty—but only to aid in emanicipating the Spanish people from the thraldom of tyrants, should the opportunity for such redemption ever present itself. Business affairs, connected with my newly inherited fortune, compelled me to visit Madrid: but no sooner were those matters settled, when I set out on my journey to England. I travelled alone, without ceremony, without attendants; my purpose was to proceed as rapidly as possible, avoiding encumbrances of all kinds. A post-chaise bore me to the Pyrenees. Oh! with what mingled feelings of hope and fear did I enter upon this journey. The mountainous boundary being crossed, I hurried on through France. The nearer I approached to England, the more torturing became my suspense. Sometimes I was buoyed up with enthusiastic hopes: at others I was a prey to the most torturing apprehensions. But all these had I likewise experienced during my captivity at Cadiz. Now, however, as I approached England the dark side of my thoughts grew darker. You might be no more—you might have gone to some far distant clime, without leaving a trace to guide me in the search: or even if you were in your own native land, it might still be impossible to discover you. I reached Dover: and accident led me to take up my temporary quarters at an hotel where you were known. The moment my name was perceived upon the card fastened to my trunk, I became the object of interest with the persons of that establishment. Miss Marshall sought an opportunity of dropping a hint that she knew me—at least by name. Some conversation took place; and you may conceive how great was the tide of enthusiastic joy which was poured into my soul, when I learnt many particulars concerning you. Yes: I learnt that you were alive and well—that you were in reality unmarried—that your heart remained unsusceptible of that passion which was consuming me—and that you had very recently experienced a change in your circumstances of a fortunate description. Miss Marshall spoke of you in the kindest and most friendly terms: she spoke of you indeed with the tender interest of a sister: and I firmly believe, Elizabeth——yes, I am convinced of it—she looked not unfavourably upon me when I confessed to her the object of my visit to England—that I came as a suitor for your hand! That she deemed me thus worthy of espousing her dearest friend—for such you are in her estimation—her conduct towards me showed. She gave me certain information how to discover your residence on my arrival in London—or at least she told me as much as she herself knew at the time upon the subject. I have been to the house which you have recently left—a picturesque little dwelling not far from hence. There I found a female who had been your servant; and she directed me hither. Now, Elizabeth, you know all. My narrative is ended—and my fate is in your hands. You have a word to speak—a word which will either fill me with happiness, or condemn me to despair. I pray you that it may not be spoken inconsiderately or rashly. I came to lay my title and my fortune at your feet. I can give you rank and riches; but what is ten thousand times more valuable—I can give you a heart which never loved before it first became impressed with your image, and can never love another! Now, Elizabeth, solemnly do I conjure you to reflect that the life of a fellow creature is in your hands!"

"My lord," answered the lady, in a low, soft voice,—and in a voice that was tremulous too,—"if I were to tell you that I am insensible to all these proofs of so much love on your part, I should be something less or something more than woman. I pretend to be neither: and certainly I am not without a feeling of gratitude for this attachment which you have maintained towards me. But would you have me wed where my heart is not won? Count Christoval, I again repeat that this heart of mine cherishes a friendship for you, but knows not the feelings of love——or at least not *now*!"

"What is your decision, Elizabeth?" he asked. "You have not pronounced it. Assuredly you have given me no hope; but you have not consigned me to despair. Perhaps," he added, with a look of mingled bitterness and apprehension, "you regard me as a bandit—and you shrink at the idea of joining your hand to mine?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Miss Paton, a convulsing tremor passing vividly through her entire form: for she felt visibly and keenly at the moment that upon this ground they were at least on an equal footing. "You wrong me——or rather, you do not understand me——no, you cannot! There—take my hand in friendship! It is a proof that I do not shrink from you—that I have no right to do so; but it is not given in love—because I will neither deceive myself nor you by simulating a sentiment which I do not truly and faithfully experience."

There was something wild and full of impetuous emotions in her voice and manner—something strange and impassioned in her whole aspect—as she thus proffered her hand to the Spanish nobleman. He pressed it to his lips:—again and again he covered it with kisses; and it was not withdrawn, because Elizabeth had fallen into a mood of deep abstraction, and knew not rightly that this fair hand of her's was so completely abandoned to him. But suddenly feeling the fervid warmth of these kisses, she withdrew it with an abruptness that both startled and hurt Count Christoval. Yes: his feelings were hurt—his heart was wounded—and he gazed upon her in mingled surprise and reproachfulness. He gazed thus in surprise, because those vehement emotions which she had displayed, and that sudden singularity of manner, were uppermost in his mind; and he saw that there was something which had thus profoundly agitated her—but which he could not fathom.

"You must leave me now," she said, recovering her wonted composure—or at least a sufficient command over her feelings to appear outwardly composed. "Our interview has already been too long. We must meet again——once again—but only to part for ever," she added tremulously. "I will then endeavour to reason with you against this wild and insensate passion which you have cherished for me——"

"No, no—speak not thus, Elizabeth!" ejaculated Don Christoval. "You have promised me another interview—and in that promise there is hope. I will not insist upon your answer now——I will leave you—Yes I will leave you, in the joyous conviction that I have made some little impression upon your heart——"

"My lord, go not away with that idea!" said Elizabeth, more hurriedly than earnestly: "because—because——"

"Address me not with that cold formality of *my lord,*" he exclaimed. "To you I would be Diego—only Diego; and that I shall be so, I now entertain the enthusiastic hope. Oh! it was impossible that such a love as mine could be doomed to disappointment and despair! We will part now, Elizabeth. Tell me when and where we are to meet again. And let it be soon—I conjure you to let it be soon!—for I shall count the hours and the minutes that must elapse until we meet."

"Give me your address, and I will write to you," she replied, after a few moments' consideration and still there was tremulousness in her fluid voice.

Count Christoval named an hotel at the West-End of the town; and repeated his fervidly-expressed prayer that the interval ere they met again should not be a long one.

"I will write to you," she said, "as soon as——as soon as——" and still she hesitated—"as soon as I have reflected on all you have told me, Diego——my lord, I mean."

"Then farewell for the present," he exclaimed: and seizing her hand, he once more carried it to his lips.

She did not withdraw it—how could she remain altogether insensible to the manifold proofs of love which his narrative had afforded, and his conduct during this interview corroborated? No: and thus she suffered him once more to retain possession of that hand for nearly a minute.

"Farewell, dearest Elizabeth—farewell for the present!" he repeated: and then hurrying away was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

ELIZABETH'S REFLECTIONS.

IT was seven o'clock in the morning—and Elizabeth Paton was half-reclining in a large arm-chair, in her elegantly furnished chamber at Stamford Manor. She had not as yet commenced her toilet. The luxuriant masses of her long dark hair hang negligently down upon her bare shoulders—those shoulders which were of such polished whiteness, and so symmetrically modelled. She was absorbed in the deepest thought. A book, which she had taken from the table near, was held unregarded in the fair hand on which Count Christoval's lips had been so fervidly pressed on the preceding evening. Her whole attitude—her look—and the complete abandonment of her form to the influence of that reverie, showed a profound and serious communing with her own heart.

Elizabeth Paton was at that moment a splendid model for the study of a painter or a sculptor. That form, if transferred to the canvass in its seminudity and with its superb contours, would have seemed to breathe with a real life, notwithstanding the profound pensiveness which the entire figure denoted. If copied in marble, it would have appeared to glow with vital warmth, notwithstanding that the statue would be as motionless as its living original at that moment. Ah! and the poet, too, might have imbibed inspirations from the contemplation of that superb creature, in the bloom of her womanhood, but every lineament of whose countenance and every contour of whose shape retained the virginal freshness of youth. There was a softness now in the eyes that had lately been wont to look penetratingly, almost with a bold hardihood: there was a softness, too, in the expression of that countenance which had previously borrowed somewhat of a masculine aspect from the daring pursuits in which its possessor had engaged. But even had she worn her male apparel at this moment, it were without effect : it would have been lost sight of in that melting softness of the looks—in that deep pensiveness which the whole form betrayed. Yes : her face, inclined downward, and with the eyes fixed upon vacancy—that attitude of complete self-abandonment—her mien and bearing—all were purely feminine now. Her lips were slightly apart : the polished ivory teeth were visible between their coral lines ; and that mouth in its ripe redness, with a dewy moisture upon it, appeared not coarse, but borrowed a delicacy from the general expression of the countenance.

Could she regard with indifference the deep and impassioned idolatry of that handsome Spaniard of whom she was now thinking ? Could she fail to be moved by the earnest entreaties and the tender prayers which appeared to be still murmuring in her ears, in a voice naturally melodious, but rendered doubly so when breathing the language of love ? And as she reviewed her past insensibility to that passion—and in this retrospection associated the image of Count Christoval with her thoughts—could she not arrive at the comprehension of a bygone apathy and a present change ? When she was his prisoner,—although experiencing towards him a grateful sense of certain, kindnesses, there was nevertheless the true spirit of a woman to shield her against the influence of love—that spirit which smarting under a sense of wrong, blended with her natural pride, and made her feel that it was not as a prisoner she was to be wooed and won. So much for the indifference of the past. But what of the present ? In the natural generosity of her soul she had put from her thoughts all sense of bygone wrong, when she found Don Diego standing in her presence on the preceding evening. By so doing, she had removed, of her own accord—and yet at the time unconsciously—the main barrier which had rendered her heart inaccessible to the influence of his adoring affection. Thus they had met in England on far different terms and under very different circumstances from those in which they stood when so many months together in Spain. Had those months been prolonged to years, and had those circumstances continued the same—*she* a captive and *he* the gaoler—her heart never would have become accessible to the slightest impression which Christoval's assiduities sought to make upon it. But now that they had met on other terms,—*she* in freedom, *he* no longer appearing in the invidious light of a captor—*she* independent to become the arbitress of his fate, *he* confessing that this destiny of his was in her hands,—that impression had been made in an hour which whole months under other circumstances had failed to accomplish. The beauteous bird, imprisoned in a cage, may often be vainly wooed, and coaxed, and encouraged to sing ; and thus many weeks and month's and long, long periods pass in the utter silence of its melody : but when freed from its captivity, it will in a moment pour forth the blithe carol of its gushing music—nor in anger for the past, refuse to warble it in the ears of him who had been its gaoler. Like the bird of our metaphor, is often the heart of woman.

And so it was with Elizabeth Paton. On the preceding evening she had persevered in the assurance that she experienced towards Count Christoval naught but friendship, and could feel no love : and she truly thought so when she thus spoke. But each time the assurance was repeated, it was in a less firm voice, and with a gradually growing tremulousness of the accents. The hand, too, which she abandoned to him more than once, was snatched away because she recoiled from the bare idea of manifesting an undue weakness : and yet the fervour of the kisses imprinted thereon, had not failed to touch an electric chord vibrating to the centre of her heart. Moreover, the strong mind of Elizabeth Paton had been destined to enter upon a phase of wild romance : it was not merely entering upon that phrase now—it was in the midst of it. Had not Christoval reminded her that *he* had been a bandit ? and did not his words suddenly excite the painful—aye, the poignant reminiscence, that *she* had pursued a similar career ? What therefore was it now that was engaging her thoughts ? what was the strange and fanciful phase of weird-like romance through which her mind was passing ? The similarity between that episode in *his* life and that episode in *her* life, appeared to indicate that they were destined for each other—inasmuch as this parity of conditions had seemed to exist for the purpose of abrogating the possibility of reproach from one to the other. Pursuing the train of her reflections, Elizabeth Paton thought to herself that if from the first moment she met Count Christoval in Spain, it was written in the book of destiny that she should become his wife, certain circumstances were requisite to work out that degree. Amongst those circumstances was the imperious necessity which had driven *her* to adopt in England a bandit career, similar to that which *he* had pursued in Spain. By these means was it brought about that they stood upon the same level. *He* had been a bandit, and yet had preserved unimpaired many of the finest, the most chivalrous, and the most magnanimous attributes of man: *she* also had been a bandit, and had preserved the most estimable jewel with which woman is endowed. All these considerations appeared to assimilate their conditions to an extraordinary degree—to fit them for each other—to establish something like a peculiar aptitude in their union, in short to point *him* out as the only man to whom *she* could dare reveal the secret of her career and then accompany him to the altar—and to point *her* out to him as the only woman whom *he* might take as a wife without the fear of always blushing as he met her regards.

From all that we have been saying, the reader may perceive that Elizabeth Paton was rapidly succumbing beneath the influence of that wild worship and ineffable idolatry of which she was the object: she was yielding to that love so impetuous yet so tender—so fervid and yet so delicate, which the Spaniard experienced for her. No wonder that there was this softness in her looks: no wonder that all her traits should once more become unexceptionably feminine. The influence of love was melting whatsoever of masculine hardihood or artificial boldness wherewith her former pursuits and habits had temporarily endowed her. She was becoming a woman—all a woman—once again!

But had she endeavoured to escape from such thoughts as these, that on leaving her couch she had taken up a book and thrown herself in that arm-chair to read it while waiting the entrance of her maid? Yes: she *had* attempted to divert her mind from dwelling on these new ideas which were raising up within her—stealing into her brain, and gradually diffusing their influence throughout her entire being. On retiring to rest after her interview with Don Diego Christoval, she had been unable to sleep—at least for some hours: she had remained awake, pondering on all that had passed—endeavouring to persuade herself that her heart was not touched—that she was still inaccessible to love. When sleep had at length visited her eyes, the image of the handsome Spaniard appeared to her in her dreams; and these were of a roseate hue. When she awoke again, the bright sun of a cloudless August morning was shining in at the window: she had risen from the couch to avoid the influence of the thoughts of the over-night, and which had been continued in her dreams: she had thrown herself into that arm-chair—she had taken the book—she had endeavoured to fix her attention upon its pages—but all in vain! Her eyes—those superb dark eyes—were soon gazing upon vacancy: all the powers of her vision were concentrating themselves inward, to dwell with a more earnest look upon the image of Count Christoval: her right arm drooped gradually and languidly—and though her hand still retained the volume, yet it was but mechanically—herself being unconscious that she still held it. And then had ensued that long train of reflections which we have described.

"Yes: the reverie was a long one; and at its conclusion, Elizabeth had reached the conviction that Diego and herself were destined for each other, and that she must learn to love him as he already loved her. Ah! when once the meditations of a woman have reached such a point as this, it ceases to be an endeavour to love: it becomes a facility—a necessity—an easy and natural gliding into the experience of the fullness of the heart's passion.

Elizabeth Paton awoke from her reverie: she was startled up by a new thought which had suddenly flashed in unto her mind. Was it that she dread to reveal to Count Christoval the one passage in her own life's history which assimilated her condition unto his? No: for this she would reveal to him unreservedly and frankly—aye, and even if necessary, with an eagerness which should prove to him that he need never blush in her presence when retrospecting over the incidents of his own career. What then was it which startled her thus? It was the recollection that she had been married to Villebelle. True, she had surrendered up the documents which she had held in proof of this marriage: but was there not the record thereof in the register at the British Embassy at Paris? True likewise, that the Marquis of Villebelle had married another: but was it not this latter marriage which was void? and was not the former one valid according to the laws of man? And then, too, her father, the Marquis of Eagledean—would be for a moment consent that she should contract another marriage, even though he might approve of the Spanish nobleman as a suitor and forget the worst portion of his antecedents? These reflections were gloomy enough. But suddenly the light of hope flashed in upon them. Had not her father enjoined that she should resume her maiden name of Elizabeth Paton? and in issuing this command, was it not virtually and effectually ignoring that former marriage? Was it not blotting out as much as possible the memory of that mock-ceremony? Yes: it must be conjectured—it must likewise be hoped—that such was the idea which the Marquis of Eagledean had entertained when bidding his newly found daughter resume her maiden name.

Did Elizabeth upon this occasion resolve to fulfil her promise speedily, and write to Count Christoval? No: she determined to wait a few days—to examine still more minutely and deliberately into the condition of her heart. But this was not so easy as she at first fancied. She composed her looks in such a manner that when Alice, her maid, entered the chamber to assist at the morning toilet, she saw not that there was anything peculiar on the part of her mistress; and throughout that day, too, did Elizabeth Paton so bear herself that neither her brother nor Adolphus observed aught unusual or different in her demeanour. The next day it was the same. But all this while there was a rapidly increasing love springing up in the soul of Elizabeth Paton. The spirit had gone forth over the hidden waters of her heart: they had sparkled and bubbled up quickly—the springs of the fountain were opened—and each fresh thought that they engendered gave a new impulse to their flow. Had she been ten years younger, she would have taken as many days—perhaps as many weeks—to comprehend what love was, as now it required hours to endow her with its fullest experience. And thus, during these two days, she felt a growing inclination to accord the handsome Spaniard the promised interview. The third day passed—and the struggle to restrain herself from penning the lines which should bring that interval about, was maintained with a greater difficulty. On the fourth morning she asked herself wherefore she should delay it any longer? and what reason there was why she should not come to a speedy explanation concerning herself with Don Diego, in order that she might be in a position to deliberate for the future? And now arose in her mind the transient fear that Christoval might recoil from her when he learnt that episode in her life which had struck her as so peculiarly assimilating their positions. But no: this apprehension was evanescent indeed—for she knew that the Count's love was potent beyond the exercise of any volition on his part—amounting to an idolatry over the romantic infatuation of which he held not the slightest control!

On this fourth morning, then, she penned a brief note to Don Diego Christoval—to the effect that she would meet him at seven o'clock in the evening at a particular spot, which she described, and which he could not fail to comprehend, as he must have passed that way both coming and returning on the evening of their first interview. Throughout that day Elizabeth preserved the same external calmness as hitherto. She had no fear of being prevented from keeping the appointment by any proposal on the part of Frank or Adolphus to accompany her on evening walk. For we must here observe that both she and Frank were giving Adolphus lessons on such branches of education as he had experienced no opportunity of pursuing since he was twelve years old, on account of his long captivity from that date of his life, at Beech Tree Lodge. It was immediately after breakfast that Elizabeth took her turn to instruct him; and in the evening, after dinner, Frank became the friendly tutor. Thus was it that Elizabeth felt assured of being enabled to go forth alone and meet Don Diego Christoval. But did she not reflect that perhaps she was acting in a way of which her father would disapprove? This idea had not escaped her consideration: but she had resolved that the interview about to take place should be the last until the return of the Marquis of Eagledean. Indeed, she sought this interview for the purpose of assuring herself that Christoval would still continue in the same mind towards her after he had learnt the *one* evil episode in her life. It was necessary she should arrive at a certainty on this subject before she made any communication to the Marquis in respect to the appearance of the Spaniard in the nighbourhood, and her own altered feelings towards him.

The spot which she had appointed for the interview, was about half-a mile from the mansion, and in a somewhat secluded lane. Thither she proceeded at the hour specified: and now her beating heart, her throbbing temples, and the flushing which she felt upon her cheeks afforded additional evidences to those she had previously acquired that her feelings had indeed undergone an immense change in respect to Count Christoval.

The moment she appeared in the lane, she beheld him hastening—almost flying, towards her. He approached with anxious looks of suspense, seeking to read upon her countenance the *fiat* of his destiny. Oh! love has a wondrous prescience—a marvellous power of penetration!—an electric spark seems to fly from heart to heart, revealing in a moment as much as it would take minutes or hours for words to make known. Between two hearts that love, and though communicating thus by that mutual and mystic intuition, there is as rapid an exchange of thought as between the two extremities of the electric telegraph—thus outstripping by an almost inexplicable agency all other means of reciprocal correspondence.

"Heaven be thanked—I am happy, I am happy!" ejaculated the impassioned Christoval, the moment he was near enough to catch in warm transfusion the first glance of Elizabeth's eyes; and with all the fervid rapture of his enthusiastic nature, he seized her in his arm—he strained her to his wildly throbbing breast.

Nor did she immediately disengage herself from that embrace. She allowed her form to remain enfolded by those arms thus fervidly flung around her; she received upon her lips the impassioned caresses of love: she caught the electric fire—and she gave those kisses back again. But this scene of tenderness—profound, glowing, ineffably, delicious—lasted but a few moments; and then gently withdrawing herself from the embrace of the enraptured Spaniard, Elizabeth said in earnest tones, "Yes, I love thee—I love thee!"

Don Diego Christoval gave no immediate reply—no words escaped his lips—the power of utterance was suspended: but his looks far more eloquently testified to the fervid rapturous joy that filled his heart. Never had he experienced such emotions: he seemed to be in the midst of paradise, but overcome by the intoxicating influence of its fragrance and its beauties. His brain swam round: the delirium was wild and whirling—but delicious beyond all power of description. Elizabeth comprehended the ecstacy which her adorer's heart experienced; and it was an augmentation of her own happiness to feel that she had been the source of such ineffable delight.

"Is it possible—is it indeed possible?" said the Spaniard, his feelings at length breaking the seal which an overpowering bliss had placed upon his lips; "is it a reality? or is it a dream? Oh, it is a joyous reality—it is an ecstatic truth; and at this moment the world contains not a being happier than I. Captivity is now recompensed: anxiety, care, suspense, and suffering—all are amply rewarded! Dearest, dearest Elizabeth—it is the devotion of all the rest of my life that you have this day ensured unto yourself!"

"My dear Diego," she said, "tranquillize your emotions—let us speak deliberately—for I have much to tell you. Give me your arm, and we will walk here awhile together. I am about to deal frankly and candidly with you: I am about to unfold some circumstances of my life upon which I can only look back with sorrow and regret. But at once understand me——"

"I do already understand you, dearest Elizabeth," he interjected: "for your friend Miss Marshall spoke enthusiastically of the stainless purity of your character as a woman."

'And did she tell you no more?' asked Elizabeth, in a tremulous voice.

"She told me that although you had for some years passed by the name of Mrs. Chandos, yet you might confidently and truly proclaim yourself to be unmarried. Ah! your friend, Miss Marshall, took compassion on my suspense—she sympathized with me in my anxiety to learn all those particulars concerning you, so deeply, deeply interesting to myself!"

"But there is now a revelation," interrupted Elizabeth, "which it behoves me to make without delay. Diego," she continued, looking him full in the face and yet with a deep blush upon her cheeks and the glitter of uneasiness in her eyes "what would you think of me if I were to confess that what you have been in Catalonia, have I been in England?"

"Oh! no more of this, my worshipped and adored Elizabeth!" ejaculated the Count in fervid accents. "Had I even found you a lost woman—the most depraved of your sex—had I discovered you plunged deep down into the slough of shame and self-abandonment,—had I been compelled to seek the vilest den of pollution itself in order to drag you thence—I should not have continued the less your devoted lover, your constant worshipper! But, as a woman, you are all that a lover can admire or a husband hope to find; and whatsoever misdeeds of another character you may have been driven or led to commit, weigh as naught with me. You love me, Elizabeth—you have given me your heart—you will become my wife—and my happiness is incapable of diminution!"

"Thanks—a thousand thanks, dearest Diego," murmured Elizabeth, "for this assurance:"—and throwing her arms about his neck, she embraced him tenderly of her own accord.

They walked together for half-an-hour, during which Elizabeth, represented to the Count that she was under such immense obligations to her benefactor Mr. Gunthorpe, that she dared take no farther step in respect to her love for Christoval until that gentleman returned from Wales. She thought it better at present not to reveal the secret of Mr. Gunthorpe's high rank, and of the close affinity which substituted between him and her: for the Marquis had enjoined the strictest secrecy on that subject, and his daughter would not violate it, even to that man from whom, if she were the complete mistress of her actions, she would have withheld not a single incident or thought.

"Mr. Gunthorpe's absence," she proceeded to observe, "will not be very long—because I know that he has a particular appointment to keep in London with a young friend of his, a certain Mr. Deveril, for the 20th or 21st of this month. But if, by any accident his absence should be prolonged even until then, I will write to him—I will tell him everything—how you have sought me in England—how my heart has been so suddenly filled with a devoted love towards you; and I will beseech him to give his permission that you may visit at the mansion. But in the interval we must see each other no more."

"No more? and for many days!" said Count Christoval in melancholy accents. "Do not be thus cruel, my beloved one, after having infused so much happiness into my heart!"

"It must be as I have said, Diego," she replied, earnestly and entreatingly. "You would not injure me with my benefactor—you would not encourage me to disobedience? No: it is an additional proof of your love which I now demand. Rest assured that the strength of mine will not be impaired by this temporary separation. Will you not agree to my proposal?"—and as she thus spoke, Elizabeth pressed his hand, gazing at the same time beseechingly and tenderly upon him.

"I will do all that you require," he answered, giving back that look of fondness. "But our separation must not last for many days: it would become insupportable for me! You promise, dear Elizabeth, that I shall not be doomed to a long absence from you?"

"Judge my feelings by your own," she replied. "And now, dearest Diego, we must separate."

"Farewell, my own well-beloved!" he exclaimed, once more folding her in his arms: "farewell, farewell—and remember that I shall endure with a cruel impatience the interval that is to elpase ere we meet again."

They separated—and Elizabeth Paton retraced her way slowly to the mansion, feeling the warmth of her lover's kisses still upon her lips and cheeks, and the pressure of his arm around her waist. Her heart, too, was filled with indescribable emotions of happiness and joy; and she murmured to herself, "Now I can discourse with Frank upon the delicious sensations of love!"

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE RETREAT IN WALES.

In the vicinity of Rhavadergwy—a town in Wales,—stood a small but pleasing residence, in one of the most picturesque parts of Radnorshire. The site of this habitation was upon an eminence: and a beautiful garden sloped gently down to a purling rivulet which formed its boundary. In the rear of the house there was a paddock, in which the deer disported gaily, and where the swans floated upon a large piece of artificial water.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, that the Marquis of Eagledean, having walked forth from Rhavadergwy, where he arrived on the previous evening, approached this dwelling of which we have just spoken. His countenance expressed a mingled anxiety and seriousness. More than sixteen years had elapsed since he had seen Lady Everton; and he was now about to present himself before her. He had learnt in the town that she lived in an almost total seclusion—that she was exceedingly charitable and devout—but that it was generally reported and believed in the neighbourhood that her reason was affected. The Marquis had not chosen to appear too minute in his inquiries: and therefore beyond these few particulars he had learnt little or nothing.

On reaching the vicinage of the habitation, he stopped short at a distance of about fifty yards, and gazed upon it with the feeling we have above described,—a feeling of mingled seriousness and anxiety. Yes: upwards of sixteen years had elapsed since he had seen her—and she was then thirty years of age. She must therefore be now forty-six. Must not an immense change have been accomplished during this interval in her personal appearance?—a change too all the more remarkable and all the greater, because it was not the lapse of years alone that would have effected it—care and sorrow would have combined to accomplish the work. There was something profoundly sad—something indeed solemnly awful in the thought, that perhaps in a few minutes he would at a single glance be enabled to observe the full extent of that change, and to perceive how powerful had been the ravages of time and the desolating influences of affliction. And then—as he stood thus meditating—back to the mind of the Marquis of Eagledean came the image of Alexandrina as she was when he had last seen her. *Then* she was in all the glorious beauty of womanhood,—perfectly resembling that portrait which he had so recently seen in his daughter Elizabeth's possession, and which was engraved from an original painted in 1828, when she was in her thirtieth year. *Then* her countenance was of a perfectly oval shape, with a forehad of noble height—a forehead, too, fair and pure as the chastest marble of Paros: and the splendid face was wont to be framed with a perfect cloud of raven tresses showering upon her superb shoulders and upon her back. *Then* the darkly pencilled brows threw out in lovelier contrast the purity of those temples on the opals of which they were set; and the long ebon fringes of the eyes mitigated without subduing the lustre of the magnificent orbs themselves. *Then*, too, the lips from which his own had so often culled ecstatic but guilty kisses, were full and of the richest redness; and the low bodied dress, which she was wont to wear in compliance with the fashion of the age, afforded a glimpse of the well-proportioned bust. Such was the bright and beautiful image which was conjured up to to the memory of the Marquis of Eagledean—the image of her who had possessed his first and only love—the love of an entire life! And as he reflected upon this image, and thought how time and affliction might have marred those lovely lineaments, rendering their possessor prematurely old,—the tears trickled down the nobleman's cheeks; and he wept—Oh! he wept as convulsively as a child!

And was not *he* too changed? Would even the penetrating eyes of love,—if love she still cherished towards him—be enabled to discern in his altered person one single lineament to remind her of the handsome and courtly individual who had been the object of her worship in bygone years? The Marquis indeed felt that the meeting which was about to take place, would be under very painful circumstances.

Wiping away the tears from his cheeks, and subduing his emotions as well as he was able, Lord Eagledean advanced a little nearer to the dwelling and reached a hedge-row that bordered the garden on the side skirting the road along which he was walking. In a few moments he beheld a lady descending the steps of the front-door. She came forth slowly—looking neither to the right nor to the left—but with her eyes bent downward, as if in deepest thought. She was dressed in black; and a sable veil was thrown over her head—but not so as to conceal her features. From the point where the Marquis suddenly halted on perceiving her, he could not obtain even the slightest glimpse of that countenance; and yet he felt convinced that this was the Alexandrina of his enduring and faithful love. Yes—the figure was exactly of her stature: it was not bowed by years—it was still upright as in her youthful days he had known it to be. But it was from an intuitive presentiment rather than from actual observation, that he experienced the conviction that this was she whom she sought.

He remained where he was concealed behind the hedge, hoping that she would approach near enough on the other side for him to observe her attentively and well, so that whatever shock might be destined for him from her altered appearance should have passed away ere he revealed himself to her. Descending the steps, she traversed a large grass plat in front of the mansion—and then slowly entered the gravel-walk which ran behind the hedge. Her steps were deliberate: she advanced like one who was all the time absorbed in profound thought, and who took no notice of the trees, the flowers, and the natural beauties by which she was surrounded. The sun was powerful—and she drew her veil completely over her countenance: so that as she approached nearer to the spot where Lord Eagledean stood, he could obtain no glimpse of those features on which he yearned to gaze again. But her figure was little impaired by the lapse of time: it was not emaciated—it was not reduced to leanness—on the contrary, it presented all the fine contours of a more youthful period. Could this lady indeed be she whom he had come to visit?

She passed by on the other side of the verdant barrier; and the Marquis strained his eyes to penetrate also through the thick folds of the veil: but the attempt was vain—he could not catch the slightest glimpse of the countenance thus hidden. She proceeded on towards the lower part of the garden; and Lord Eagledean continued his way to the gate which afforded admittance to the grounds.

He opened it—he entered the garden—and then he hesitated whether to go and accost that lady, or whether to advance up to the house at once and make the usual inquiry which a visitor would put. At that moment a domestic, in a plain dark livery, appeared upon the steps: he was an old man, and one who might at once be set down as being a faithful dependant of long standing in his present service. The Marquis accosted him, and said, "I wish to see Lady Everton: is that her ladyship walking yonder in the garden?"

"It is, sir," responded the old servant: "but her ladyship receives no visitors. All matters of business must be conducted through Mrs. Jameson——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lord Eagledean; for he remembered that this was the friendly housekeeper at Everton Park, who had been admitted into the confidence of her mistress in respect to the birth of the two children. "But I have some very particular intelligence to communicate."

"If so, sir," observed the footman, "there will be no harm in your introducing yourself to her ladyship: she can but refer you, if necessary, to Mrs. Jameson."

The old man spoke courteously—even benevolently; and the Marquis of Eagledean, thus encouraged, was about to hasten away towards the extremity of the garden—when it suddenly occurred to him that if Alexandrina should chance to recognize him at once, a scene might possibly ensue which she would afterwards deeply regret and wish to have been avoided. He accordingly turned back again towards the footman,—saying, "All things considered, it would perhaps be better that I should see Mrs. Jameson first."

The domestic bowed, and led the way through a hall, up a staircase, to a room where an old woman with hair as white as snow was seated, occupied with her knitting. She was dressed in black; and in her look benevolence was mingled with sadness. She was not so much altered but that the Marquis would have recognised her, even if he had not been informed who she was.

"Mrs. Jameson, a gentleman wishes to see you on some business connected with her ladyship;"—and having placed a chair for the accommodation of the Marquis, the old footman withdrew from the apartment.

Lord Egledean sat down, and did not immediately speak—for he saw that Mrs. Jameson's looks had been at once earnestly fixed upon him. They grew more searching: the expression of her countenance showed that memory was doing its work faithfully, and that he would be recognized by her. Ah! then if *she* were thus enabled to penetrate through the change and alteration which years had effected in him, how much more easily would Lady Everton have done so! and how prudent was the precaution he had thus taken in seeing Mrs. Jameson first!

"My lord, my lord," said the old woman, trembling from head to foot with the violence of her emotions, "I know you—I recognize you! What brings you hither?"

"Need you ask?" inquired the Marquis: "can you not conjecture?"

"But your wife, my lord—the Marchioness of Eagledean," interrupted Mrs. Jameson, —"is she not still alive? is she no more?"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the nobleman; for these words struck him as a revelation, instantaneously making known to his comprehension some new phase in the villany of Mr. Everton. "My wife—the Marchioness of Eagledean——I never was married!"

A cry of mingled joy and astonishment burst forth from the aged house-keeper's lips, as she started up from her chair: then fixing her looks earnestly and penetratingly upon the Marquis, she said, "My lord, I adjure you by everything you deem solemn and holy, to proclaim the truth, whatsoever it may be!"

"I have already proclaimed it," he replied, profoundly agitated. "I am incapable of deceit. I never have been married——No: never, never has the image of your mistress been absent from this heart of mine!

"Oh what misery—what long years of misery, wretchedness, and woe might have been spared to my poor mistress, had she known the truth!"—and as Mrs. Jameson spoke, she resumed her seat, wringing her hands, while tears trickled down the countenance that was furrowed with age.

"The blackest iniquities have been perpetrated," said the Marquis with bitter vehemenace: "but until this moment I did not even suspect their fullest extent. And now let me hasten to ask you a question——Does Lady Everton know that her son Adolphus is yet alive?"

Mrs. Jameson gave a wild start—and then sinking back in the chair, gazed in speechless astonishment upon the Marquis of Eagledean. She evidently knew not what to think; and by the expression of her countenance it was apparent that she feared his reason was unsettled.

"No, my good woman—faithful dependant of your mistress that I am sure you have been—I am not deceived—I am not deceiving you! It is another truth that I proclaim—Adolphus lives—and what is more, his rights are acknowledged! Yes—his villanous uncle has abondoned the title and estates which he had usurped!"

"Then, my God be thanked!" said the old woman in a tone of the profoundest piety. "There may yet be happiness in this world for my poor mistress:"—and having thus spoken, she clasped her hands together—raised her venerable countenance—and the prayer of thanksgiving, which she said inwardly, wavered upon her thin lips.

"I see that we have much to talk about—many things to converse upon," resumed the Marquis, after a pause, "ere the intelligence be broken to your mistress that her son is alive and that I am within these walls. In a few words let me likewise explain to you that our two children Elizabeth and Frank are well and happy. They are beneath my roof in the neighbourhood of London——But again you survey me with the deepest amazement?"

"Because, my lord, it has this moment become *your* turn," replied Mrs. Jameson, "to reveal another phase in that scheme of villany which has been practised towards the poor mistress. Four years have elaped since she was assured in a letter from her brother-in-law, that poor Frank was no more—and that Elizabeth, having inherited *his* fortune according to the terms of your lordships trust-deed, was dissipating it rapidly, as she had already dissipated her own, amongst the profligate and dissolute."

"All false—abominably, atrociously false!" ejaculated the Marquis, springing up from his chair, and beginning to pace the apartment in a terrible state of excitement and rage. "Oh, the monsters to whom the welfare of these dear children was entrusted!—Oh, that miscreant Everton! Shall they, after all be suffered to escape condign punishment? or shall not a terrific vengeance alight upon their heads? But no, no: there are a thousand considerations——I must calm myself—I must compose these wildly agitated feelings of mine!"

Thus speaking, Lord Eagledean resumed his seat; and giving his hand to Mrs. Jomeson, he said in an altered voice—a voice full of solemn emotion,—"You have been a kind and faithful friend to your mistress: accept my heartfelt gratitude!"

"Oh, my lord," she replied, the tears still streaming down her cheeks, "you know not what happiness you have imparted to my soul! and what happiness, too, is now in store for her ladyship! But let us hasten to discourse on those subjects which require mutual explanation; for I long—Oh, I long to be enabled to go and commence breaking to my dear mistress all the joyous intelligence that I shall have to impart!"

"In respect to my beloved children Elizabeth and Frank," said the Marquis, "I need not tell you that now they are under my care, they are amply and richly provided for: but the fortunes that I settled upon them upwards of sixteen years ago, have been self-appropriated by those villains Petersfield and Marston."

"Heavens, her ladyship's own brother!" ejaculated the housekeeper. "And it is false, then that Elizabeth has led an evil life—that she ran away from her husband the Marquis of Villebelle, with a paramour——"

"All false—all diabolically false!" exclaimed the Marquis: then in a graver tone, he added, "It is my firm conviction that no female in the land can boast herself more pure, more chaste, than my daughter Elizabeth. I have not time now to enter into details: suffice it for me to tell you that her marriage with the Marquis of Villebelle was a mockery—a marriage into which she was coerced by the villain Marston—a marriage that was never consummated, and one which would not hold good according to the English law. As for Frank, Lord Petersfield procured him a situation—a menial one, at Court. It was so easy for a peer of the realem thus to dispose of a youth whom he had basely plundered! But little did he imagine that poor Frank's memory would be so good in recognizing those whom he had seen in his earlier years. One day, two ladies whom he had met in the company of his mother at Everton Park, and also at St. James's appeared at Court together. I know not who they could have been——".

"Lady Hesketh and her beautiful cousin Miss Villiers," remarked Mrs. Jameson. "They must have been the two ladies to whom your lordship alludes. I will tell your lordship presently how they came to be acquainted with Lady Everton's secret."

"Well," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, "as I was saying, Frank recognized that Lady Hesketh whom you have named, and her beautiful cousin Mrs. Villiers, when they appeared at Court together. But although he thus recognized them, he knew not their names. They, as a matter of prudence, denied that they were acquainted with him—denied indeed that they knew who he was, or had ever seen him before. Doubtless the report of his death had not reached their ears; or else they would have seemed still more surprised. But certain it is that soon afterwards Lord Petersfield thought it better to have Frank removed from a place where he might meet them again; and he accordingly transferred him to the service of Saxondale, at whose mansion he was no doubt well aware that Lady Hesketh and Miss Villiers did not visit."

"Oh, what a ramification of treachery!" cried Mrs. Jameson, holding up her hands in astonishment and dismay. "Years have elapsed since any communication took place between these ladies and my mistress; for when Lady Everton resolved upon retiring to this seclusion in Wales, she broke off all her past friendship—resigned all her previous acquaintances!"

"And therefore," observed the Marquis, "Lord Petersfield entertained little fear that your poor mistress would learn from Lady Hesketh or Miss Villiers that her son Frank was really alive and had been seen in a menial capacity at the Palace. But now, Mrs. Jameson, have the goodness to explain to me those matters concerning which I am yet in the dark,—all that occurred, in short, from the time that I quitted England in the year 1828."

"I will, my lord," responded the old housekeeper: "but it shall be as succinctly as I can—for I am sure that you are impatient to have speech of her ladyship."

"Yes," replied Lord Eagledean: "but ere we meet, I would rather be acquainted with everything—so that she may be spared the pain of having any explanations to give."

"Your lordship can well understand," resumed Mrs. Jameson, "that the knowledge of my poor lady's secret put her completely in the power of that bad man her brother-in-law. He came and gave his orders at the Park just as if he were the master. He represented to my poor mistress that after all he had learnt, she was not a fit and proper person to have full charge of her son Adolphus during the father's absence. He removed Adolphus to the western extremity of the building,—lodging him in apartments to which there was a communication by means of the private staircase. He introduced creatures of his own to surround the boy—to attend upon him—and doubtless to keep watch over him also. As the time approached for my lord's arrival from India, Mr. Everton sent up all the old servants of the Park to the town-house in London, for the purpose, as he said, of making the fullest preparations there to receive his lordship. I was packed off along with the rest; and Everton Park was left in the hands of the strange domestics whom Mr. Everton had planted there. I went away with a heavy heart—for I suspected some mischief: but I was relieved to a certain extent when I found that Mr. Everton himself was about to proceed to London and pass a few days at his own house. I will now describe what took place at the Park after I and my fellow-servants had removed to the town-residence; although I did not learn the full particulars from my mistress's lips until some time later. It appears that several days elapsed, during which her brother-in-law being absent, she was permitted to enjoy more of the society of Adolphus than she had previously been. But one day she was taken seriously ill. I must tell you that Mr. Everton had located a medical man at the Park, under pretence of watching over the health of Adolphus. My poor lady has often declared to me her conviction that she was taken so seriously ill in consequence of some medicine which that surgeon had persisted in prescribing for herself. Certain it is that she fell into a complete state of stupor—a lethargy which rendered her unconscious of all that was passing around her. In this condition she remained nearly a week; and when she came to herself, it was only to learn the dreadful intelligence that Adolphus had been taken ill on the same day as herself—just one week back—and that he had died during the night. Indeed, the funeral was to take place on that very same day on which my poor mistress recovered her senses. Her anguish was ineffable: it *must* have been so—and in the wildness of her despair, as she afterwards told me, she plainly and openly accused her brother-in-law, who in the meantime had returned to the Park, of making away with his nephew. He rejected the accusation with an indignant burst of passion, which seemed so natural that it made her ladyship regret she should have advanced such a charge. The medical man was there to corroborate Mr. Everton's denial of the wickedness; and for the time being the poor lady's dark suspicions were lulled, or perhaps absorbed in the bitterness of her grief. She had not the satisfaction, as she subsequently observed to me, of contemplating her dear child's remains: for they were already, as was represented to her, locked up in the coffin which was about to be borne away to the tomb. She was however conveyed by her female dependants to the chamber of death: and she wept scalding tears over the coffin. She was borne back to her own room in a state of unconsciousness—fever supervened—and she remained delirious for several days. When convalescent, her brother-in-law remonstrated with her for the infamous charge she had levelled against him; and while again indignantly repudiating it, he bade her observe that it was an ungrateful recompense for his kind forbearance in keeping the secret of her amour with your lordship. My poor lady fancied she beheld a threat in this intimation; and though her suspicions in respect to poor Adolphus's death revived somewhat in her bosom, she felt herself so completely in the power of her brother-in-law that she dared not give utterance to another word."

"The earth contains no miscreant greater than that brother-in-law!" interjected the Marquis of Eagledean. "Mrs. Jameson, all those arrangements which he made at the Park, and which you have described,—the surrounding Adolphus with his own creature—the introduction of a medical man, doubtless well bribed to his interests—the sending away of yourself and the other faithful servant of the household—and the administration of some medicament which paralysed her ladyship for a whole week,—all these things were done to enable him to carry out his diabolical design! For the corpse of a pauper boy was secretly conveyed into the house by night—while Adolphus was borne away to Beech-Tree Lodge,—a place possessed by Mr. Everton in the village of Hornsey, and where poor Adolphus remained sixteen years in captivity!"

Mrs. Jameson was horrified at this statement: and some minutes elapsed ere she could resume her narrative. But at length she continued thus:—

"As soon as my poor mistress was again convalescent, she hastened to London to be at the town-mansion when her husband should arrive from India: and then it was she told me of all that had taken place at the Park. Of course the tidings of Adolphus's death had already reached us in London; and I can assure you that heads were gloomily shaken, suspicious looks exchanged, and dark misgivings murmuringly whispered amongst us all. But what could we say? what could we do?—and I, who was most in her ladyship's secrets, knew how completely she was in the power of her brother-in-law! Well, the General returned from India. Oh! how altered he was. He never was of prepossessing appearance: but he came back looking like a wretched old man—with broken constitution and shattered health, all sacrificed at the shrine of his ambition! It was a hard task for my poor lady to maintain anything like composure when he conversed with her, upon her pursuits during the years of his absence. He was much cut up by hearing of the death of his son,—which intelligence, I should observe, had reached him the instant he set foot in England, and therefore previous to his arrival in London. In one sense it was fortunate that her ladyship had an excuse for her affliction and her tears: inasmuch as her grief constituted a mask to veil from her husband's eyes the confusion and the remorse she felt at encountering him again. A few months afterwards he died. There was no foul play in his case; he was hovering on the verge of the tomb when he arrived in England. His brother then assumed the title and took possession of the estates,—her ladyship having only a jointure of three thousand a-year."

"And were you aware," asked Lord Eagledean, "that at the expiration of twelve months from his lordship's death, I wrote from Germany to your poor mistress?"

"Yes, my lord—I am approaching that subject now. Her brother-in law, who had become Lord Everton, doubtless expected that you would take some such step as that—and of course, from all you have told me, it by no means suited him that you should return to England."

"No—because he might have been well aware that if I became the husband of your mistress, I should institute a strict inquiry into the circumstances of Adolphus's death. And moreover," continued the Marquis of Eagledean "there can be no doubt that he had already come to an understanding with his sister-in-law's brother, Sir John Marston,—that while he was to do what he thought fit to obtain the title and estates of Everton, Marston and Petersfield might on their side look upon the fortunes of Elizabeth and Frank as their own booty. But proceed, Mrs Jameson."

"Well, my lord, I was going to observe," continued the old house-keeper, "that my lady's brother-in-law was on the look-out either for your return to England, or else for the arrival of letters from you. A letter did come—and he intercepted it. When he had read it, he took it to my mistress, whom he allowed, or rather compelled to reside at the Park. She was in a bad state of health—deeply desponding—and with a mind painfully attenuated. In such a condition it was not a very difficult task for him to coerce her into a particular course of action: her reputation was in his hands—he could shatter her fair fame at any moment, as if it were brittle glass! He compelled her to write back a particular style of answer to yourself; and he knew from what you had previously written that it would prove conclusive—for you had left my dear mistress to decide upon your fate. No reply came: or if you ever wrote again, the letters reached not my mistress."

"I never wrote again," observed the Marquis of Eagledean. "I retired to Italy—adopted an assumed name—and dwelt in retirement."

"My lady's brother-in-law," continued the housekeeper, "appeared now to feel more assured of his own position; he no doubt concluded that all apprehensions which had arisen on your account, were fully disposed of. Time wore on—and her ladyship became more her own mistress: she was gradually relieved from the species of restraint which her brother-in-law had put upon her. Sometimes she went to stay with the Princess Sophia at St. James's Palace; but generally she dwelt at the Park. She felt dull and lonely; and she invited Miss Dalrymple and Miss Villiers to stay with her. These two young ladies were cousins—they were orphans too, and totally dependent upon distant relatives, whom they did not love. It was therefore a pleasure to them to experience the friendship of my poor mistress—while on the other hand it was a pleasure to her to have them with her. They became her bosom friends. It was in the year 1832 that her ladyship inquired of her brother Sir John Marston, whether any tidings had been heard of your lordship. The reply was in the negative: but doubtless Sir John informed Lord Everton ——or *Mr. Everton* as he all along ought to have been called——that such an inquiry had been made. That bad man, naturally trembling lest his sister-in-law's affection for your lordship was as strong as ever, and might lead to the revival of a correspondence between you, paid a visit soon afterwards to the Park, and displayed a letter which he purported to have received from some place on the Continent, and which letter contained an account of your lordship's marriage."

"A base fabrication—a vile forgery!" interjected the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Alas! we knew it not at the time: and the intelligence," continued Mrs. Jameson, "struck my poor mistress as with a death-blow. It destroyed a hope—the last hope which she had all along cherished: namely, that you would still return. She became dangerously ill: once more did delirium seize upon her—and one evening in her ravings she betrayed her secret to Miss Dalrymple and Miss Villiers. But they were kind-hearted, generous-minded girls—the elder not more than twenty-one at that time, the other two years younger; and they deeply sympathized with their friend and benefactress. As she got better, she experienced a deep yearning to see her children; and they were accordingly brought by Mrs. Burnaby to the Park. This was with the consent of her brother-in-law—but only on the condition that immediately afterwards Elizabeth should be removed from the care of Mrs. Burnaby and sent to a boarding-school."

"The better," observed the Marquis of Eagledean, "to enable Petersfield and Marston to work out their ulterior designs. But pray proceed."

"My narrative is drawing towards an end," said Mrs. Jameson. "A year afterwards my poor mistress was on a visit to the Princess Sophia at St. James's Palace. Lord Petersfield presided over the Princess's household: and by his permission her ladyship was allowed to see her little Frank again. About ten months after that, Mrs. Burnaby died. Then Lord Petersfield decided upon sending Frank to the same school at Southampton where his sister Elizabeth had already been two years. But before he was conducted thither, Lady Everton begged that she might see him. Lord Petersfield declared that it must be for the last time, as the boy was getting too old to permit these occasional interviews to be continued with any safety to her ladyship's secret. His lordship brought Frank to the Park—and then took him to Southampton. Shortly after this incident Miss Dalrymple became the wife of Sir Albert Hesketh; and her cousin Miss Villiers went to reside permanently with her. Lady Everton now resolved to carry into execution a plan which she had some time back conceived: namely, that of retiring from the world. All her hopes of happiness in this life were dead within her; she believed your lordship married to another—she had seen her children, as she thought, for the last time—and for their future welfare she had little apprehension, knowing how bounteously your lordship had provided for them, and never entertaining the most distant apprehension that Lord Petersfield and her brother Sir John Marston could play those children false. When her determination of retiring to some remote seclusion was communicated first of all to Sir John, he exhibited an appearance of the most affectionate zeal in volunteering to find her a suitable dwelling; and her brother-in-law also testified a semblance of the kindest consideration, by offering to purchase and make over to her whatsoever retreat Sir John Marstyn might decide upon. In the course of a few weeks her ladyship was informed that a sweet little domain in Wales had been found and purchased for her use."

"Yes—those villains," exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, "were all too glad to get her into quarters as remote as possible!"

"It was at the close of the year 1834, some months after Mrs. Burnaby's death, and after that last interview with little Frank,—that her ladyship came down into Wales. She brought with her six of the oldest and most faithful domestics belonging to her household, in addition to myself. Arrangements were made with her brother-in-law for the payment of her jointure through Messrs. Marlow and Malton, Solicitors of Parliament Street, Westminster.

"And they were doubtless instructed by the brother-in-law," observed the Marquis, "not to give her ladyship's address to anybody."

"My poor mistress herself," continued the housekeeper, "determined, on retiring from the world to break off all correspondence with her former friends and acquaintances. She wished to separate himself as much as she could from the past, in order that the future years of her life might flow on as tranquilly and as uninterruptedly as possible. The only subject on which she sought occasional information from her brother and brother-in-law, was the welfare of her children. Years passed on. In 1839, Elizabeth being then of age, her ladyship received the intelligence that she had married the Marquis of Villebelle; and it was a source of gratification to her to find that *one* wish she had formally expressed was thus fulfilled by the bestowal of a noble name upon her daughter. But some time afterwards she was plunged into affliction by the intelligence that this daughter had separated from her husband and was living irregularly. Then came the news of Frank's death——"

"All done," interjected the Marquis, "for the purpose of stifling her future inquiries relative to the children, by making her believe that one was dead and the other unworthy her consideration. And now tell me, Mrs. Jameson, in what frame of mind her ladyship's existence has been passed."

"With the exception of those two causes for deep affliction—and which, thank heaven, in a few minutes will be dispelled—her ladyship has experienced a degree of mental tranquillity which, if not altogether natural, has at least saved her health and her person likewise from the ravages of a bitter anguish. I do not think, my lord, that the tone of her mind *has been* altogether natural: it may be described as a calmness both death-like and glacial;—it has preserved her from excitement and irritability—but I fear that if Providence had not sent you hither now, with all these happy tidings, she would gradually sink down into idiotic apathy. She seldom speaks; and when she does, it is with a strange coldness,—a coldness that it does one harm to feel the influence of. She seldom reads and never works: but she either sits in the drawing-room gazing from the window—or else wanders in the garden, or about the neighbourhood, in a kind of dull listless mood. Nevertheless, there are moments of activity with her; and these are when dispensing her charities: for her jointure is far more than suffices for the maintenance of the establishment in this part of the country where everything is so cheap; and she expends large sums in doing good. Her benevolence has rendered her an universal favourite as well as an object of great interest; but I believe that most persons in the district fancy the poor lady is not altogether right in her intellects. Also! they know not her story as you and I know it, my lord——But I think that we have no need for farther discourse—and certainly no necessity for dwelling upon mournful topics. Shall I go and prepare her ladyship to see you? shall I break to her the intelligence that her son Adolphus lives—that Frank also lives—and that Elizabeth is worthy of her love?"

"Yes—go—go quickly, my good woman," said the Marquis of Eagledean, all his agitation reviving at the thought that in a few minutes he would again behold the countenance of her whom he had loved for upwards of thirty years.

"I go, my lord," replied Mrs. Jameson, cheerfully. "But one word more. What may I tell her of Adolphus? Consider the questions that a mother is sure to ask——"

"I comprehend you—I understand you full well," exclaimed the Marquis. "Tell her that he is a fine tall handsome young man of whom she will be proud. But more;—there are other tidings with which you may gladden her poor heart! Tell her that her daughter Elizabeth is one of the handsomest women of whom England can boast; and that Frank is a youth of an almost fabulous beauty. Go and tell her all this—and I will await you here."

Mrs. Jameson hurried from the room, her countenance beaming with brighter smiles than it had worn for many and many a long day, to execute the pleasing task which she had in hand.

CHAPTER XC.

THE INTERVIEW.

In consequence of what the worthy old housekeeper had said with regard to Lady Everton's personal appearance, the reader is prepared to learn that it had not undergone such a very great change as under all circumstances might have been expected. We will proceed to state that although her ladyship was now forty-six years of age, she might have easily passed herself off as little more than forty. There was no colour upon her cheeks—but the cheeks themselves were not sunken nor hollow: the lustre of her eyes was subdued—but then, in her earlier years it had been so bright that this mitigation of their brilliancy had only softened and not dimmed them. Her hair, of raven darkness, had so far resisted the ravages of time and the withering influence of sorrow, as to be only touching on the commencement of a change—and this to be detected only by a tire-woman when attending the duties of her ladyship's toilet. Her teeth were remarkably well preserved, and helped to ward off the aspect of advancing years. Her figure, as already stated, had retained its fine proportions; and the uprightness of her gait, together with a certain statesque carriage of the bust and head, which was natural to her, gave her an air of mingled dignity and grace which contributed to sustain her right to be pronounced a fine handsome woman.

Such was Lady Everton—such the object of the Marquis of Eagledean's visit into Wales—such the appearance which she was anon to present before him. But, Ah! if instead of being destined to meet this still handsome and attractive woman, he had been doomed to find her a withered, emaciated, shrivelled creature—with cavern-like eyes, silvered hair and toothless mouth,—still, still would he have experienced for her the same love—the same sympathy: because *his* was no sensual passion now—it was a chaste and holy affection, feeding itself upon the memories of the past, and sanctified by the existence of two beings who were the pledges of that love.

We need hardly inform the reader that during Mrs. Jameson's absence from the room where the Marquis remained, he experienced an indescribable agitation—a surging-up of a variety of emotions—at the prospect of so speedily meeting the mother of those children. About half-an-hour elapsed,—an interval that was short enough for worthy Mrs. Jameson to break to her ladyship the varied pieces of agreeable intelligence she had to impart—but an interval full long indeed for Lord Eagledean himself to endure the excitement of his stirred-up feelings. At length the door opened. Eagerly did he glance towards it: but only the housekeeper appeared. Her countenance was beaming with satisfaction and joy; and the Marquis at least gathered thence the assurance that the glad tidings revealed to Lady Everton, had produced no evil effects. Mrs. Jameson beckoned him to follow; and she led the way towards a drawing-room, at the threshold of which she stopped short for a moment.

"My lord," she said, in a low whispering voice, "I shall go no farther: you will enter there alone."

Thus speaking, she opened the door. Oh! at that instant the Marquis of Eagledean felt himself young again——aye, felt as if twenty years had been struck off the sum of his existence—felt as if a new life were rejuvenescent in his veins! He sprang forward—the door closed behind him—a cry of joy reached his ears—a form flew to meet him, quicker than he himself was advancing; and the beloved one of other times—the beloved one too of the present moment—was clasped in his arms. Years of anguish—years of hopeless sorrow—years of separation were all compensated for in these first few moments of ecstatic joy. It may seem strange to speak thus of that old man of sixty and that woman of forty-six: but their hearts had become young again—their memories travelled backward to the joys and delights of bygone times. Thus the outpourings of their rapture were as fervid and as enthusiastic as if it were a meeting of two youthful lovers. There was a whole world of bliss concentrated in that first embrace:—and joy has its ardour and its ecstasy, its bliss and its intoxication, for those of advanced years as well as for the young.

A few minutes afterwards we may behold them seated together upon a sofa, their hands locked in a firm clasp—their looks riveted upon each other. Then the Marquis saw that Mrs. Jameson had spoken truly when she represented how comparatively slight was the alteration which had taken place in the personal appearance of Lady Everton. Gradually a mournful feeling stole into the heart of Lord Eagledean; and as a long-drawn sigh rose up to his lips and half found vent ere he could stifle it, Lady Everton said in a low deep voice, "Paton, there is yet a cloud upon your happiness."

"Do you not find me much changed, Alexandrina—Oh, very much changed?" he asked: "do you not see that I have grown old, while you have escaped the ravages of time?"

"Hush, Paton—speak not thus of yourself to me," said her ladyship, still in a soft voice, and looks of ineffable tenderness. "I behold you now through the medium of a faithful memory; I behold you only in the light of that love which I have ever borne you, and which never has been impaired by circumstance or by time. If you find me less changed than you expected, I rejoice——Oh! I rejoice unfeignedly: for even now it is sweet to hear the language of admiration from your lips."

With these words Lady Everton threw her arms around the neck of the Marquis of Eagledean, and embraced him with as much fevour—with as much fond admiration, as if a long interval of years had not changed him nor made him old. The sadness fled away from his countenance—he smiled in happiness again: and sweet indeed were the smiles which played upon the lips of Lady Everton.

"It appears to me all like a dream," she said: "for I could not have hoped that there was any happiness in store for me in this world. And yet, I know not how it was—but still there would sometimes arise in my mind strange and unaccountable thoughts, that something would happen to alter my career upon earth,—some new phase in my destiny which was as yet unaccomplished. But then, so often as I found myself indulging in such fancies as these, I endeavoured to banish them from my mind as visions incapable of realization; and I essayed to settle my thoughts on a complete resignation to my present lot. Then again, I have experienced long, long intervals of a dull, listless, and mournful apathy,—a sort of tomb-like sensation, as if though alive, I was already beneath the numbing influence of death. Ah! *that* was an awful state of feeling: and yet there was a depth of tranquillity in it—an unnatural calm in which my senses were steeped. Had I given way to outbursts of anguish and all the wildness of a terrible excitement, you would not have seen me as you see me now: you would have found me a haggard, wretched, withered thing. But I abandoned myself not to those torrents of feeling—those frenzied outbursts of emotion. Hope appeared to be dead within me, save and except during those occasional intervals when the fanciful vagaries of which I have spoken, would rise up in my mind. But the general tenour of my existence for some years past may be described as the long, long death of hope—that torpor of the senses which is experienced when one knows that there is naught left in the world to crave for. However, this day has suddenly changed all that! it has given me back happiness—it has filled me with new joy—it has lifted up my soul from the depths of the sepulchre where it was benumbed—it has inspired me with fresh vitality, and with a renovated confidence in the world and in heaven!"

And again, as she spoke, did Lady Everton lavish caresses upon the Marquis of Eagledean; and he also felt that this was a day of indescribable happiness for him. They sat together for more than an hour, talking of their feelings rather than of the circumstances which demanded their attention: they dwelt upon the emotions they experienced, and not upon the plans which they had to discuss and execute. They spoke of Adolphus—of Elizabeth—and of Frank; and the tender mother made the Marquis give her the most life-like description which words could frame of the personal appearance of each of those beloved children of her's.

"And now, my dear Paton," she said, at length suddenly recollecting that after all their discourse nothing was settled—nothing resolved upon, "we must think of the future as well as of the present and the past. You can full well understand that I yearn to fold those dear ones in my arms—that this solitude has suddenly become hateful to me—that I long to fly hence and seek the spot where dwell the objects of my love. Tell me, Paton—tell me,—when you came hither this morning, had you any fixed plan to propose ? any project to suggest ?"

"My dear Alexandrina," he answered, "can you not perceive at a glance how much depended upon yourself ? You bid me talk to you of the future. The first word I must say is a question that I have to put,—a question that may seem precipitate, but on the response to which does so much of our future plans depend ?"

"Paton, I understand you, replied Lady Everton. "If you still think me worthy of bearing your name, you know not the happiness and joy with which I shall receive it !"

"The Marquis carried her hand to his lips, exclaiming, "This is the assurance that I alone required to make me happy ! And now my dear Alexandrina there are too distinct alternatives which I have to submit to your consideration. I allude to the course to be adopted in respect to our two dear children, Elizabeth and Frank. Adolphus is with them : but he knows not that they are his half-brother and sister. Is he to remain in ignorance of this secret ? or is he to be made acquainted with it ? Those are the alternatives."

"Oh ! my decision is given at once," replied Lady Everton. "Adolphus must know all—and God grant that he may not blush for his mother ! When I become your wife, how can I possibly treat as comparative strangers—as visitors—or as guests, our dear Elizabeth and Frank ? No, no : it were impossible ! Let the world think what it will : our children must be acknowledged. I beseech and implore that you will grant me this ! Whatever shame there may be to bear, it falls not on the man—it falls on the woman ; it will not touch you—it will all become mine ; and cheerfully shall I endure it rather than have to disavow those children who have been disavowed too long ! I see things in a very different light from that in which I beheld them some years back. Tell me then, that you will not be ashamed to own as your wife one whom the finger of scandal and scorn may perchance be pointed at when all the past becomes known !"

"Lady Everton had spoken thus with a wild gushing vehemence which prevented the Marquis from giving an immediate reply. It was a perfect torrent of feelings,—the feelings of a mother who now knew no other consideration than the duty which she owed towards the children of her only love, and whom she longed to acknowledge as her own.

"It shall all be as you desire," answered the Marquis ; "it is for you to decide. "Oh ! believe me, if you have strength enough to dare the opinion of the world, I have lived long enough to be too independent of it to sacrifice any of my own feelings to its prejudices. Be it therefore as you say, dearest Alexandrina; and rest assured that Adolphus will not blush for you, nor hesitate to own Elizabeth and Frank as a sister and a brother."

"Henceforth all our ideas of happiness," said Lady Everton, "shall be centred in domestic joys. If we be blessed in our children, what care we for the world ? And you will be a father to Adolphus, will you not ?—Yes, I know you will : for after all he has undergone —after that cruel and hideous captivity—his experience of the world must be circumscribed indeed, and he will require all the counsel and all the care which you can bestow upon him."

"He shall have it," responded the Marquis : "he shall be to me as dear as Elizabeth and Frank themselves. And let me add, my dear Alexandrina," he continued in a lower tone, "that the unsophisticated condition of Adolphus's mind—his inexperience in all worldly matters—his ignorance of the selfish motives which sway men's actions and opinions—and his appreciation of everything that is natural only, in constradistinction to everything that is artificial—will lead him to sympathize with a mother whose hand was sacrificed to one when her heart was engaged to another. No : there is not the slightest dread that Adolphus will blush when he learns that mother's history !"

"What more have we to discuss ?" exclaimed Lady Everton, now all in feverish anxiety to flee away from her present abode and hasten to where she could fold her children in her arms : "when shall we depart ? My preparations will soon be made: an hour —half-an-hour—a few minutes will suffice. Oh! pray tell me, dear Paton, that we are to go at once! But, Oh—I forgot!" she suddenly exclaimed: "you have travelled day and night—you only arrived here late last evening—you cannot undertake the journey homeward without adequate repose. How selfish I was! But you will pardon me—for I have become another being—you have given me new life,—I feel young—Oh! so young, that I can endure all possible fatigues!"

"There shall be no unnecessary delay," responded the Marquis. "Rest assured that I am as anxious as yourself for the arrival of that moment when Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank shall be folded in your arms. Yes: it will prove a spectacle that I long to gaze upon. Dear Alexandrina, though changed in appearance," he added with a smile, "I am not so old that I need nursing. It is now nearly three in the afternoon: if you choose to depart in an hour, let a post-chaise be sent for from the town. Or perhaps, you have your own travelling-carriage?"

"It has been unused for years," replied Lady Everton. "But we will have a post-chaise—we will commence our journey this evening—it will take us at least some distance towards the nearest line of railway connecting the principality with the metropolis. Worthy Mrs. Jameson and my faithful old footman Humphrey shall accompany us."

Having thus spoken, Lady Everton, who was full of a feverish excitement —presenting indeed a wondrous contrast to her slow, measured, and thoughtful movements when the Marquis had first beheld her in the morning walking in the garden,—Lady Everton, we say, in this new state of mind, flew to the bell; and when Humphrey made his appearance, she issued her instructions in a tone of cheerful volubility that filled the old man with delight. For the faithful dependant had already learnt from Mrs. Jameson who the visitor was, and the many glad tidings he had brought with him into Wales; so that he was overjoyed to read in his mistress's manner a confirmation of all he had thus heard.

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It was about six o'clock in the evening of the second day after the incidents which we have been relating, that a hired vehicle from a railway station approached Stamford Manor, and in a few minutes entered the grounds in the midst of which the house stood. Elizabeth, Frank, and Adolphus had not long risen from the dinner-table and retired to the drawing-room, where they were seated at the moment when the sound of wheels reached their ears. The approach of a vehicle made them all three start up: for they were anxiously expecting either the return of the Marquis or some intelligence from him. They precipitated themselves down the stairs: but Lord Eagledean, rushing forth from the vehicle before they could perceive there was any one else with him whom he had left inside, met them in the hall, and bade them accompany him to a parlour opening thence.

"Now, Adolphus," he said, when he had embraced all three one after the other,—"and you likewise, Elizabeth and Frank, prepare yourselves to behold some one who is most dear to you."

"Our mother!" ejaculated Francis, heedless at the moment whether there were any longer the necessity to keep the secret from Adolphus.

"Yes—your mother, my dear boy," responded the Marquis, in a voice full of emotion; "and *your* mother likewise, my dear Adolphus. Yes; I speak truly; Embrace Elizabeth and Frank—for they are indeed your sister and your brother —and *your* mother is also *theirs*!"

Adolphus gave utterance to a cry of mingled amazement and joy: for without pausing to reflect how this could possibly be, his first feeling was one of ineffable delight to think that Elizabeth whom he already loved as a sister, was indeed a sister—and Frank whom he loved as a brother, was indeed a brother!"

"I go to fetch your mother," said the Marquis in a hasty whisper to Elizabeth: "she longs to press you all three in her arms. During the few moments that I shall be absent you may tell Adolphus who I am——Yes, you may tell him that I am the Marquis of Eagledean."

"Having thus spoken, he hastily quitted the room; but little more than a minute elapsed ere he returned again accompanied by Lady Everton. Then ensued a scene which, for tenderness and excitement—for melting emotions and joyous outpourings alike of words and tears—for fervid embraces, repeated again, and again, and again—for fondest endearments and enthusiastic caresses, has had no parallel in this world.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE PREPARED PIT-FALL.

We must now pay another visit to Solomon Patch's public-house in Agar Town. It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, when Madge Somers, dressed in her usual gipsy-like style,—but looking more travel-soiled, weary, and careworn than she had ever yet appeared,—dragged herself painfully into that den. She was evidently sinking with fatigue; and throwing herself upon a seat in the open space fronting the bar, she bade Solomon at once serve her with some liquor.

"You seem ill, or else very tired," observed the old man, as he presented her with a foaming pint of porter. "There! take that—and if it doesn't cheer you up a bit, then my name isn't what it be."

The woman placed the pint-measure to her lips, and did not remove it till she had poured the whole of its contents down her throat: then, as she handed back the vessel to Solomon Patch, she said. "Yes, I am indeed tired. I have walked many weary miles to-day, but was resolved to reach your place to-night. Let me see—what is the day of the month?"

"Well now, what be it?" asked the old man, turning towards his wife. "Why, the tenth of August, to be sure."

"Yes—the tenth," repeated Madge Somers: then in an under-tone to herself, she said, "It was the twenty-first of July the appointment was made:—in one month, day for day, and hour for hour, was I to meet him at his own house. That will be on the twenty first instant at nine o'clock in the evening. Twenty days have elapsed, and I am no wiser than I was: I have eleven more days to find out what I want!"

"And what is it you do want, Madge?" asked Solomon Patch: for the woman had spoken those last words in a louder tone than the previous part of the sentence, and they had caught the landlord's ear. "I do really think she has lost her wits," he observed aside to three or four customers of the *Billy Goat*, who were lounging and tippling at the bar-counter.

"Not a bit of it!" said Madge Somers sternly: for her keen ears had caught the observation. "But you asked me what it is that I want to find out? Well, I have come here this evening to set every one who is in the habit of frequenting the place, on the alert to discover what I *do* want. Are there many people in the tap-room yonder?"

"Some dozen or so," replied Solomon; "and I tell you who is amongst them—an old pal of mine that I haven't seen for many a-day—Bob Shakerly."

"The resurrection-man," observed Madge Somers.

"Well, I don't think he does much in that way now," remarked Solomon: "cos why, he finds it more to his account to cut up osses for sassage-meat and what not. Howsumever, he's found his way down to the *Goat* this evening to smoke his pipe and take his rum-and-water: and there the old fellow is in the tap-room, as cozie as can be."

"Just come along with me, Solomon," said Madge: "and you also," she continued, addressing herself to the loungers about the bar.

"What on earth is she going to do now?" asked Solomon of himself, as Madge herself led the way into the public room, where the usual number of ill-looking fellows and half-tipsy women were pursuing their orgie, old Bob Shakerly being one of the company.

"Why, here's Madge Somers!" said Tony Wilkins: "and she looks as if she was a witch."

"Witch indeed!" she echoed: "I am witch enough to find out something that I want to discover—or rather I have not succeeded yet: but I will offer a prize and set all you folks on the alert, and see whether *that* will be productive of any good result."

As she thus spoke, she took from beneath her garments a greasy pocket-book; and opening it, drew forth a number of bank-notes. These she counted, keeping some in her hand and putting the rest back into the pocket-book,—her proceeding being watched with mingled curiosity and suspense by all who beheld her.

"Now, Solomon Patch," she said

turning towards the landlord, "here's fifty pounds in good Bank of England notes: and I am going to entrust the sum to your keeping. You are witnesses of the deposit!"

"But what be it for?" asked the old man, gazing with astonishment upon Madge Somers, and almost hesitating to receive the money, lest some treacherous intent should lurk beneath this conduct on her part.

"Take it—do not be afraid," she said: "I will soon explain myself. And now listen, all of you! Some years ago there was the manager of a company of strolling-players, whose name was Thompson: but what has become of him, I do not know. It is precisely this knowledge that I want to obtain. If any one will bring me this information I require before eight o'clock in the evening of the twenty-first of the month, the individual thus giving me that information, shall receive the fifty pounds which I have just lodged in the hands of Solomon Patch."

Numerous voices shouted out the willingness of the speakers to enter upon the search.

"If he's above ground, I'am blowed if I don't ferret him out," exclaimed Tony Wilkins, darting from his seat with the air of one resolved to enter upon the search at once.

"I knows a many poor vimen as was vonce strolling performers," observed a half-tipsy female, with a hiccup at every second word she spoke: "it's astonishing how them poor creature comes down in their hold hage. There's vun as used to play queens and great ladies, and was very popplar: but now she's took to get her livelihood by charging and what not."

"Oh, you be hanged!" ejaculated a rough-looking fellow, eager to put in his word. "I'll have a try for the fifty pound prize. But can't you give us no more partiklers, Madge?"

"Nothing more," she responded curtly.

"Spose he's dead, this feller Thompson," observed Solomon Patch: "what then? It ain't no use looking after him—be it?"

"Unless," remarked another of the women belonging to the company of revellers in the tap-room, "old Bob Shakerly here would have up his carkiss."

"A truce to this nonsense," interrupted Madge, with a severe look. "I have said what I wanted, and the reward is lodged in Solomon's hands. Those who like to undertake the search, can do it: those who don't can leave it alone. But it may be that if the information is given to me at the time specified, I shall increase the amount of recompense according to my means."

"Unless she loses every skurrick she's got at the vimen's gaming-table on Saffron Hill," whispered one of the guests to another.

"Well, I'm off at once," said Tony Wilkins.

"Fifty punds! my eye, it isn't to be got every day!"

"One word more," exclaimed Madge Somers. "From seven to eight o'clock on the evening of the twenty-first of August, I shall be here to receive the information required, if any one is enabled to furnish it. But I expect positive proof of the accuracy of this information. In short, Sol. Patch will not part with the reward until the intelligence that may be brought is shown to be correct."

Having thus spoken, Madge Somers turned abruptly round and issued from the room. Passing into the bar-parlour, she desired Mrs. Patch to give her some refreshments in the shape of eatables: and the order being obeyed, the woman commenced an attack upon the cold meat and other things placed before her, which showed that she must have been fasting some hours. Meanwhile Solomon Patch, having secured the fifty pounds in his strong-box, experienced no small degree of curiosity to learn wherefore Madge was so anxious to find out this Thompson of whom she had spoken. Bidding his wife attend to the bar, he passed into the room behind, with two glasses of hot spirits-and-water; and placing them upon the table, seated himself opposite to Madge Somers.

"Come," said he, "you won't refuse to drink, for old acquaintance' sake. Here's a health to you, and wishing that the business you've been a speaking of may turn out all right."

"I hope it will," she remarked abruptly. "What news in Agar Town? Anything fresh?"

"Nothing partikler," responded Solomon. "But about this little business of your'n, Madge—can I be of any assistance? Of course you must know summut more about the man Thompson than you've chose to say."

"Nothing," she observed: then in

order to change the conversation, she asked, "Have you seen Chiffin lately?"

"Well, yes—I have," answered Solomon: and he seemed to speak with some little degree of hesitation.

"Is anything the matter with him?" asked Madge, looking at the old man fixedly: "anything turned up about that barge affair?"

"No—it all seems to have died away as comfortable as possible. But here he be:"—and as he spoke, the Cannibal, dressed in his usual style, entered the bar-parlour. "Hullo, Madge!" he exclaimed: "who would have thought of seeing you here? Why, I've been up to your cottage yonder two or three times during the last week; and it was all shut up and as silent as a grave."

"Did you want me, then?" she asked.

"Well, I did rather. Just step along with me. Here, Sol, bring us up some liquor into the private room: for me and Madge have got some particular business to talk about."

"Ah? about them preparations that you've been making, I suppose," said the old man, with a sly look, full of dark and sinister meaning.

"Well, it may be growled the Cannibal: "but don't you let your tongue run quite so free—'cos why, how did you know I was going to speak to Madge on that subject? and if I wasn't, then you would have made her suspect something."

"Oh! I only meant that if you are going to let her into the secret," replied Solomon, "I am glad of it; for she's a discreet woman, and you can trust her. Besides, as I won't do it myself——"

"Now hold your jaw, you cursed old fool," interposed Chiffin, his diabolical countenance contracting with an expression of hideous ferocity, while he grasped his club as if about to strike. "As you get old you become so precious talkative there's no doing nothing with you. How do you know that what's said in here, if spoke too loud, isn't heard by the people at the bar?"

"I didn't mean no offence, Mr. Chiffin," said the old man, trembling from head to foot: for he stood fearfully in awe of the dreaded Cannibal.

"Well then, look sharp—bring us up some brandy—and lend us this light."

Thus speaking, Chiffin took up the candle from the table, and led the way from the bar, followed by Madge Somers. He ascended to that miserable looking room up-stairs which has been before described in earlier chapters of this narrative; and placing the candle upon the table, he said, "Let us sit down, Madge; we've got some business to talk about. But wait a bit till old Solomon has brought up the lush and the glasses; and then we shall be all to ourselves."

Madge Somers made no remark, but with her usual imperturbability sat down, patiently awaiting the promised explanations. While casually casting her eyes round the small and cheerless-looking room, she suddenly observed that a door had been pierced on one side.

"I see that Solomon has been making some alterations in his house," she said to the Cannibal.

"Ah! you mean that door," he remarked, with a smile of grim and sinister meaning which did not escape the woman's notice. "You know where it leads to?"

"It must lead into Solomon's own bedchamber," said Madge, after a moment's reflection, during which she passed in review the precise arrangements of the house and the distribution of the rooms, with all of which she was well acquainted. "To be sure!—that door on the landing leads into Solomon's chamber: but what has made him have another door made, communicating from this room?"

"I'll tell you all about it presently," returned Chiffin, with another peculiar smile, which was about as pleasing as the grin of some horrible monster.

At this moment Solomon made his appearance with the liquor that had been ordered; and as he placed the tray upon the table, he threw a significant look at that new door which had been made—then bent his eyes upon Chiffin—next on Madge—and then retreated from the room, closing the outer door behind him.

"Now, perhaps," said Madge Somers, "you will begin your explanations, and tell me what you want with me: because I can assure you my time is fully occupied."

"Then I suppose you've got plenty of business on hand?" said Chiffin, mixing himself a tumbler of brandy-and-water.

"Yes—you know full well that I am seldom idle. But you seem busy also. By the bye, I thought the last time I saw you, Chiffin, you intended to take a public-house or settle down in some fashion or another. Don't you remember when and where it was? That night, on the bank of the canal——"

"I recollect all about it," interrupted the Cannibal savagely, as if he did not over and above like the particular allusion thus made. "It was when you came to bring me the news that Lady Saxondale didn't mean to let the detectives go on against me and Tony Wilkins. Of course you guessed very well who it was that did the business for that scoundrel Tugs and his wife——they meant to do for me and get all my money: but I'm blowed if I don't do for them!"

"It served them right," remarked Madge coolly. "But what business have you in hand?"

"Something that will put a decent sum into my pocket," answered Chiffin; "and then with what I have got already, I shall be ready to retire from business altogether," he added with a chuckling laugh; "and instead of taking boozingkens or lodging houses, or anything of that sort, I shall settle down as a genelman and live on my means. But as you have let me into a many good things with you, I'll let you into this with me—leastways, I want some one to help doing a certain thing; and as old Solomon won't have anything to do with it himself, I thought of you. So I have been up to your place two or three times, but couldn't find you——"

"Well, never mind," interrupted Madge: "you have found me at last. Here I am—and now for your explanations. What do you want me for? and what can I get by helping you?"

"Fifty guineas," responded the Cannibal; "and only for a few minutes' work."

"Well, proceed. My time is occupied: but still I can spare enough for your purpose, particularly if it is to be well paid."

The Cannibal drew his seat a little closer to that where Madge was placed; and having drained his tumbler, and mixed himself another jorum of hot brandy-and-water, he addressed her in the following manner:—

"I am not going to mention any names, 'cause why it isn't necessary. But you must know that there's a certain party who wants two other parties put out of the way. It's two genelmen whose disappearance I have got to bring about. The hint how to do it was given me by the lady—for it *is* a lady—and I don't mind saying this much—who is employing me. She doesn't want these two genelmen to have their throats cut and their bodies found anywhere above ground, which would only cause an immense sensation, as the newspapers say, and lead to no end of inquiries. But what she wants is for these two genelmen to slip out of the world just as easy as if the earth opened and swallowed them up—so that there sha'n't remain the least clue to show where they have gone. Their friends and relations may fancy they have ran away or anything they like: but that's no business of mine. It's enough for me to know that if these two genelmen disappear all snug and comfortable, with no chance of never turning up no more, I shall get two——I mean a decentish sum, out of which I can afford to pay you fifty for helping me."

"Go on," said Madge, imperturbably, "I am listening."

"Well, you see," proceeded Chiffin, "I sha'n't be at any loss to entice those two genelmen here; because I know how to do it, and have got an execuse ready. And what's more too, I have got the arrangements all made, settled, and done, to send them out of existence much nicer and easier than if they was let down on the drop at the Old Bailey: 'cause why, *here* there won't be no ropes round their necks to break their fall and hold 'em up tight."

"Go on," said Madge again, her countenance now exhibiting some degree of interest.

"Come and look here," said Chiffin. Taking up the candle, he opened that newly made door which had already engaged the woman's notice, and led her into the adjoining room, which for many years had served as the chamber where Solomon Patch and his wife were wont to sleep. Madge, as before stated, knew it well: but she now found it completely changed. The bed had been removed—it was no longer fitted as a sleeping-room at all, but was arranged as a parlour; though still meanly enough furnished. There were a few windsor chairs; a table stood upon a carpet about twelve feet square; and a large piece of furniture, like a bureau, was placed against the original door of communication which opened from the landing. This door we will henceforth call the *old one*, to prevent any confusion when speaking of the *new one* which had been made to communicate with the adjoining room.

"Well," said Madge Somers, glancing around, "I perceive all the changes that have taken place here: but I cannot understand their purpose."

"I will soon tell you," replied Chiffin, with another of his half-ferocious half-sinister grins, accompanied too with a low chuckling laugh. "It was lucky I knew a capital feller of a carpenter, and another good chap of a bricklayer—two blades of our own sort, and who were glad enough to work for a friend like me as long as they were well paid. Why, I was forced to give old Solomon fifty guineas to let me pull his house to pieces like this here. "But I tell you what's more—I have humbugged him," added Chiffin, lowering his voice to a whisper, "that I will take the *Billy Goat* off his hands, and gave him a thousand pounds for the good will. He knows I have got the best part of the blunt, and shall have the rest: and so he bit at it directly."

Madge Somers was too keen and penetrating not to have already suspected, from what the Cannibal had been saying, that the changed but tranquil aspect of the room concealed some preparations fearfully treacherous; and she bent a look of augmenting curiosity upon the Cannibal.

"Now, Madge," he said, continuing to speak in a low mysterious voice, "you will understand it all in a few minutes. Didn't you know that in one of the cellers underneath this house, there's a thundering deep well, which hasn't been used for a great many years, because somehow or another the water was found to be putrid. It may be that a dead body found its way to the bottom a long time ago which made the water bad: but whether or not the well has never been used for the last fifteen years and the mouth of it in the celler was covered up with paving stones. Well, the next thing I must remind you of is, that underneath this room where we are standing—and therefore betwixt this floor and the ceiling of cellar—there's that scullery-place which old Sol and his wife have never used except to put odd things in. One of the very first things that I had done, was to have the bricklayer and brick up the window of the scullery that looks into the back yard—all natural enough, 'cos why the window was broken out and Solomon pretended to be afraid that some of the queer chaps which frequents the house might get in through that way and pay a visit to the premises which they are so familiar with. The next thing was to make a large hole in the scullery floor, which formed an opening, as you can very well understand, into the cellar; and of course it was managed that this opening should be just above the mouth of the well. The third thing to be done was to cut a square out of this floor here where we are standing——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Madge, for a moment losing her presence of mind as Chiffin pointed with his club down towards the carpet—and she instinctively started back.

"Why, you ain't such a fool," he exclaimed, with a chuckling laugh, "to think that I am going to send you right bang through to the bottom, are you? Not I, indeed! You've never done me no harm, but some good turns at times——"

"Go on," said Madge, instantaneously recovering her self-possession: "but it was enough to make one start to know that one was standing upon a trap-door which might suddenly fall like a gibbet-drop beneath the feet"

"Yes: and it's arranged just like a gibbet-drop too! Look here—the trap-door is exactly in this spot:"—and Chiffin kicked aside the carpet as he spoke, showing that the square cut out of the floor was just between the threshold of the new door that had been formed, and the table.

"I understand," observed Madge. "You expect that the two gentlemen who are to be so pleasantly disposed of will pass, one close upon the heels of the other, through this new door; and then the instant they stand on the trap-door, down it is to fall!"

"If you had concocted it all yourself, you could't have described it better," observed the Cannibal. "You shall lead the way, as if it was all fair and right enough, and make believe as if I was going to sit down with them swell coves to deliberate at this table. They will follow—and then, as you have so well twigged it down they must go! You see, on account of the situation of the well underneath, it was necessary to have the trap-door exactly in this spot; and therefore it would not have done to introduce them by the *old door*. If so, when coming in, they would pass clear of the trap. Now, as it is, the moment they pass the thereshold of the *new door*, they put their feet on the trap, and it's done in a jiffey."

"And the assistance you require of me" said Madge, now fully penetrating the object for which her own services were needed, "is to pull the bolt, or touch the secret spring, or whatever the contrivance is, just at the proper instant ?"

"Right again, old gal !" answered Chiffin. "You see that great lumbering bit of furniture against the old door. Well, it's nothing but front and sides—the back and the shelves are all taken out ; and so any person can hide inside of it. That's the place where you will be. There's a hole in the front here——look, you see it——where you can peep through. You will have to go on your knees, because the spring that lets the trap fall is in the floor just behind that furniture. So, when once you have plumped down on your knees——not to say your prayers," parenthetically observed the Cannibal, with another diabolical laugh——"you can peep with one eye through the hole, and can catch hold of the iron knob of the spring with one hand at the same time. It works precious easy, as I will show you when the moment comes. But you must take precious good care not let to *me* down through the trap instead of the two genelmen."

Again did Chiffin indulge in a coarse but subdued guffaw ; while Madge Somers, with her wonted imperturbability, remarked, "Don't be afraid—I shall be looking out for my reward, and as it will be in your pocket I shall not send you down into the well. But when do you think this business is likely to take place ?"

"I only wanted somebody that I could rely upon to help," answered Chiffin, "in order to take the necessary measures to get the two genelmen here as soon as possible. Now that I have seen you, and you've agreed, I'll set about it without delay. Perhaps, if you was to call here the day after to-morrow, I should be able to tell you more. Or shall I look up at the cottage ?"

"No—I shall not be found there," answered Madge.

"Well, I think it was high time for you to leave that wretched tumble-down crib," observed the Cannibal. "You will call here——eh ?"

"Yes—the day after to-morrow. If you are busy elsewhere, leave word with old Sol when I am likely to be wanted, and I will be punctual. And now, if you have nothing more to say, I shall wish you good night."

"Good night, Madge. But I say, by the bye," exclaimed Chiffin, "do you happen to have seen that Lady Saxondale of late—she, you know, that me and Tony——"

"As if I did not know perfectly well who you mean," interrupted Madge, fixing her eyes keenly upon the Cannibal for a moment, and then averting them.

"Of course—because you stalled her off from setting the detectives to work. How the deuce did you manage to have any influeuce with her ?"

"We will talk upon the subject another day," responded the woman.

"Yes : and then may be——But no matter," said the Cannibal, interrupting himself : for he was afraid if he let drop any more, Madge would suspect that her ladyship was his employer in the present business, and that if she found out he had been promised the enormous sum of two thousand guineas for accomplishing the diabolical deed, she would not be contented with the fifty guineas which he had offered for her assistance.

"Good night," said Madge once more : and she thereupon took her departure from Solomon Patch's boozing-ken.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE FEMALE GAMESTERS.

IT was about half-past ten o'clock when Madge Somers emerged from the precincts of Agar Town. For a little while she walked on slowly and thoughfully, as if pondering deeply on all that had taken place at Solomon Patch's, and likewise hesitating as to what particular course she should pursue. But by degrees her thoughts settled themselves into a resolution ; and when this was once taken, she quickened her pace as she proceeded on her way. She reached King's Cross, and passed down Gray's Inn Road. In half-an-hour from the time she left Agar Town, she drew near the maze of streets, alleys, and courts which constitute that vile district whereof Saffron Hill may be deemed the principal thoroughfare. Still she walked on; and at length, on reaching Staffron Hill itself, suddenly stopped short.

"No," she said, in subdued but vehement ejaculation: "I will *not* go there again! I have a duty to perform —and it must be done."

Nevertheless, there appeared to be an inclination in this woman's mind stronger than that sense of duty to which she had alluded; and while she fain would have obeyed the latter, she was irresistibly urged on by the former. She advanced for some twenty or thirty yards, and then stopped short again: a powerful struggle was taking place within her. But her weak point proved the stronger one, paradoxical as the expression may seem; and still she walked on. On reaching the entrance of a court, dismal and dark as the mouth of a cave, she paused once more—she endeavoured to turn her steps in another direction—but her evil genius prevailed; she plunged into a court—and muttering to herself, "Only just for one short half-hour!" knocked three times at the door of a house at the farther extremity.

It was opened in a few moments by a female; and a light glimmered faintly forth: but the door was only thus opened to the length of a chain which held it secure, until Madge Somers mentioned her name: for in the darkness of that court her countenance was scarcely discernible even with the glimmering light that struggled out. Then the chain was let loose—the door opened—and she exchanged a few words with the female who had thus given her admittance. This was the mistress of the house—the presiding genius of one of the vilest dens which then existed, or still exist, in the British metropolis. She was an elderly woman, with a pale ghost-like countenance, and small dark eyes, glittering like those of a reptile, but looking larger than they were by reason of the blue circles of the hollow caverns wherein they were set. Her features were sharp—even painfully thin; and her mouth, surrounded by wrinkles, was drawn in with a constant habit of compression. Some grizzly gray hair escaped from beneath a dirty white cap, which added to the corpse-like appearance of her countenance. Her figure was lean and shrivelled: she wore a soiled rusty black-stuff gown, and seemed to have but very little under-clothing—for the skirt fell straight, without the slightest bulging out from the waist. Altogether she was a hideous-looking creature—not merely repulsive, but a woman whose aspect was sufficient to make a beholder afraid. A capacity for any wickedness was as legibly imprinted upon that vile countenance, as if her character had been printed thereon.

She led the way down a narrow dirty, dilapidated staircase, into a back kitchen. This place was not more than fifteen feet square, and all the centre was occupied by a large deal table. There was a rude form on each side, and a wooden stool at either extremity. Two tallow-candles in brass sticks stood upon the table, around which were crowded—indeed, huddled as closely as they could pack themselves—a number of females, whose ages ranged from the young girl of thirteen or fourteen to the old hag of seventy or eighty. The heat was stifling, but the company present appeared not to feel the least inconvenience from that sickly atmosphere,—all their thoughts and all their senses being absorbed in the occupation that was going on. And this was gambling.

Yes: it was a gambling-house for females. None of the other sex were admitted there; and only those who were well known to the mistress of the den, or who were properly introduced by old-standing friends, could obtain ingress thither. At the head of the table sat a woman who was as much like the one we have already described as any human being can possibly resemble another. Indeed, they were sisters: but it was the elder one, who had admitted Madge Somers, that was the mistress of the place—the other was merely paid by the first-named to conduct the gaming-table. We are thus minute as to particulars, because it is no imaginary den which we are describing, but one which existed at the period whereof we are writing.

The woman who presided at the gaming table, kept a regular "bank" —just the same as at the great gambling-houses of the West End, one of which we described in an earlier chapter of this narrative. The "bank," which was contained in a tin box with three distinct compartments, consisted of gold, silver, and copper money; and the woman who acted as *crouptere*, had a wooden rake to gather up or push the coin about in the most approved style of the avocation. An imperturbable gravity rested upon her thin ghastly countenance; and if there were any personal trait in which she differed from her elder sister, it was that her eyes, though equally as sinister in expression, had a more steady gaze: but when fixed upon you they produced the horrible effect of snake that glares intently upon your countenance!

The female gamblers, assembled in this den, were not entirely of that excessively low description which the reader may possibly have anticipated at the outset. There were several women amongst them who, by their appearance, were evidently the wives of small shopkeepers residing in the neighbourhood: but three or four of the youngest were prostitutes, who plied their hideous calling in that vicinage, and who, when they obtained a few pence or shillings, rushed to this den in the hope of increasing by one vice the gains derived from another.

If we were to take a peep into the front kitchen of the house to which we have introduced the reader, we should find ample preparations in progress for a supper that was to wind up the night's amusements. A large table, twice the size of that in the back kitchen, was spread for at least four-and twenty guests. A number of black-handled knives and forks, pewter pots, metal salt cellars, pepper-castors, and mustard-pots, were spread upon a dirty cloth; and at an immense fire a horrid-looking old woman, evidently half-tipsy and who took quantities of snuff in the filthiest manner possible, was superintending the culinary process. A leg of mutton and a leg of pork, roasting in front of the grate, were both basted with the gravy that dripped from each and which united in a large yellow pie-dish set to catch it. Upon the fire, another leg of pork and another leg of mutton were boiling in an enormous cauldron, together with a piece of beef; and divers saucepans contained proportionate quantities of vegetables. It may be thought that these masses of provisions were immense considering that the table was laid but for two dozen guests: but when it is stated that each one of those guests would anon be prepared to attack the provender with the utmost voracity, and to eat as long as the physical capacity would allow, it will be seen that the preparations were by no means on too large a scale. We must add that this supper was given gratuitously to all the frequenters of the house, who might drop in between the hours of nine in the evening and one in the morning to take their chance at the gaming table. The supper, thus provided without cost to the devourers, was a great allurement for the establishment: but the profits of the gaming-table were ample enough to permit this spread to be given nightly.

All the upper part of the house remained unoccupied, except by the two sisters and the old cook; no lodgers were received, the great aim being to keep the real nature of the place as secret as possible. The elder sister, who was the mistress of the establishment, had kept it for years. She had amassed several thousand pounds; and in one of the northern suburbs of London there is a row of some ten or a dozen small cottages, built by means of that money upon freehold land, and all this infamous woman's property!

It was to the den which we have been describing that Madge Somers paid a visit after leaving Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town; and she was evidently as well known at the former as at the latter place—for on entering the back-kitchen, nods of recognition passed between herself and the assembled female-gamesters. But few words were exchanged, as all were too intent on the chances of the dice to have much thought for other subjects. The stool at the foot of the table being vacant, Madge took it: and for some minutes she watched the game with the eagerness of one of its most impassioned votaries. All recollection of that duty which she had imposed upon herself, and which had more than one made her hesitate when on her way thither from Agar Town, was now lost sight of, she had no thought, no sense, no faculty for anything save and except the game that was progressing. At the expiration of about ten minutes, she drew forth her greasy old pocket-book, and producing a bank-note, requested change of the *croupiere*. This was immediately given; and she staked a sovereign. She lost. Again she paused for a few minutes ere she ventured another coin: but presently the chances of the dice seemed favourable once more, and a second piece of gold was staked. Now she won. Then followed a run of luck; and in about ten minutes twenty sovereigns were piled up before her. With a kind of desperate resolution she rose from her seat, and said she should go: but she was immediately assailed by numerous entreaties on the part of the players, "that she would take *one* more chance."

She wavered—the entreaties were pressed: she consented—and sat down again. In another ten minutes the pile of gold had disappeared; and another note from her pocket-book was changed. The run of luck was now against her, while a young girl of barely fourteen, who had commenced that evening with a few coppers, had ten or a dozen sovereigns in front of her.

The game continued; and presently the mistress of the establishment, who had quitted the back-kitchen almost immediately after Madge's arrival, reappeared, bearing a tray on which was a single wine-glass, while in her right hand she carried a large stone jar. This contained gin—or rather a compound of the woman's own concoction, consisting of some of the distiller's spirit, with a very large amount of vitriol and sugared water. She filled the wine-glass, and presented it to the young girl who was winning gold. The lost creature took it and poured its contents with avidity down her throat, giving a sigh of pleasure when she had imbibed the deleterious fluid. The glass was re-filled, and presented to the female who sat next. In this manner it went the complete round—Madge Somers being the only person who did not accept the proffered dram: for of all her vices a love of ardent spirits was not one.

The fiery liquor gave an unnatural exhilaration to the spirits of those who were already excited by the fluctuating chances of the game. But it must be confessed that the whole proceedings of this den were in one sense orderly enough. If ever a player attempted to quarrel, or disputed some particular point, she was instantaneously called to order by the *croupiere*, and the effect was truly magical—for that woman had contrived to establish a despotic authority over the frequenters of the house, and thus was she invaluable to her elder sister. An occasional oath passed unnoticed: but if anything really obscene or disgusting was said, it immediately called forth a severe rebuke, accompanied by a threat of expulsion—in which menace the generality of the players seemed perfectly ready to back the *croupiere*; for it must be understood, as already hinted, that there were several females present who called themselves "respectable married women."

It requires but little effort of the imagination to penetrate the circumstances under which some of these "respectable married women" visited this den. We may suppose one to be the wife of a man keeping a potato and coal shed; that she had gone out to collect a few little debts owing by the poorer customers in that neighbourhood; and that with the few shillings thus gathered into her purse she dropped in with the hope of converting them into as many guineas. If she lost, she would go home full of excuses to her husband: the debtors had not paid—she had fallen in with her friend Mrs. So-and-so, who had engaged her to supper—and hence her coming home so late. Perhaps the husband himself was at the public-house; and reeling home half-tipsy at a still later hour, was unaware of the time when his wife had entered. Very likely a quarrel might take place, originating on one side or the other: but what might be still more certainly reckoned upon, was that in the long run the principal profits of the business would go into the pocket of the woman keeping the gambling den, and insolvency would overtake the potato and coal shed.

From the little sketch thus hurriedly given, the reader may form an idea of that class of "respectable married females" who frequented the den. There are at this moment several gambling-houses for females in London; and many a small tradesman finds out to his cost, that his wife has been allured to one of these *pandemonia*. As a matter of course, the idea of those who frequent such places is, as we have above hinted, that they will convert their pence into shillings, and their shillings into pounds. Insensate fools! infatuated wretches! If they only paused and reflected for a single moment, they would perceive that the keeper of the gaming-house alone gets the profit—and that this profit is to the loss of the gamesters themselves.

But to return to the thread of our narrative; Madge Somers continued playing—at first cautiously, as we have seen her—then, as she lost, with a growing recklessness—and ultimately, as her losses increased, with a kind of desperation. She did not give way to any outburst of passion—she neither vociferated nor gesticulated: but her looks, her attitude, her entire bearing indicated one prolonged, continuous, and concentrated sense of terrific excitement. Now her eyebrows were drawn up—now they became corrugated: now her half-open mouth and the suspended breath showed the poignancy of her suspense—then the nervous quickness with which she drew forth another note and hazarded another stake, served as a farther proof of the desperate recklessness with which she was playing. Ultimately, at about two o'clock in the morning, she rose from her seat at the foot of the table,—muttering to herself, "Not a shilling left! no, not a penny!"

But still she thrust her long bony fingers into every recess of the greasy old pocket book, to ascertain if perchance a bank-note, or even a sovereign might have become embedded in some corner. No: it was empty—and she was indeed penniless. The remains of the last sum of money she had received from Lady Saxondale had that night been swallowed up in the same vortex to which hundreds and hundreds of pounds of the woman's money—the ill-gotten gains of long years of crime—had already found their way.

"Now then for supper!" ejaculated that same young girl whom we have already noticed as being in Fortune's favour on this particular night: and well she might speak exultingly; for she was the possessor of thirty golden sovereigns—a sum that appeared to her a colossal fortune.

"You will stay and take some supper, Madge?" said the elder sister of the two who presided over that den of infamy.

"Not I. You know I never stay to supper," responded Madge Somers: and then, in a savage tone, she added, "Come and open the door, and let me get away as quick as ever I can."

The keeper of the gambling-house was too well accustomed to Madge Somer's eccentric moods to take any notice of the present one; and she accordingly gave the inveterate female-gamester prompt egress from the place.

CHAPTER XCIII.

WILLIAM AND ANGELA.

It was on the evening of the day following the incidents recorded in the previous chapter, that, between eight and nine o'clock, William Deveril and his sister Angela were seated together in the ground-floor parlour of their beautiful little villa near the Regent's Park. The weather was warm, even to sultriness; for there was not the slightest breeze to dispel the heat which the sun of a glowing August day had left behind after sinking into its western home. The curtains had within a few minutes been drawn over the window: but the casement itself was open. A lamp burnt on the table; and its light shone upon the handsome countenance of the young artist, and on the enchanting features of his sister, as they conversed together in a cheerful strain.

An angel in loveliness as well as in name, that beauteous creature might well be described as the most ravishing embodiment of female charms ever beheld by mortal eyes. We delineated her portrait in one of the earliest chapters of this narrative, when she appeared upon the stage of the Opera: we described her when she burst upon the delighted vision of the thousands gathered there to pour forth their enthusiastic plaudits, which were as much a tribute to her matchless beauty as to her proficiency in the dance. We beheld her *then*, expressing and personifying the poetry of motion with sylph-like delicacy and winning grace. We *now* behold her at home, beneath her own proof—plainly but tastefully attired; and though the brilliancy of the portrait may be somewhat subdued, yet as it lost nothing of its beauty. The dress which she now wears, sets off the exquisite symmetry of her shape to as much advantage as did the aerial drapery which she wore upon the stage: the statuesque contours of her full and graceful form are developed, while at the same time they are concealed, by the costume which now clothes them. Her shining dark hair falls in massive tresses upon the softly-rounded shoulders: her eyes, so large and dark, beam with the holiest lustre of purity and innocence. Bright as are those regards, yet are they full of a virginal chastity: for her's were looks which angels themselves might bend upon earth from the sunny regions of heaven. It needed but a single glance at Angela Deveril to convince the beholder that virtue had chosen her fair bosom as a temple wherein to establish its home, and that the purity of her thoughts had not been marred by her contact with the theatrical sphere.

We said that the brother and sister were conversing cheerfully; and it was so. For was not William now happy in his love for the beauteous Florina Stannton? and was not Angela happy at the success which thus promised to crown her brother's highest aspirations? She herself knew not what love was—she had never known it—naught beyond the love which she had experienced for her parents, and which she felt for her brother: but to that *other* love which glowed in *his* heart towards Florina, and which Florina reciprocated so tenderly and so devotedly, the unsophisticated Angela was utterly a stranger. She however saw that it was potent to produce happiness or misery; and now that it was creative of the former feeling in respect to her brother, she rejoiced that she should know it and acknowledge its empire.

But let us listen to some part of the conversation which is taking place between them.

" It is close upon nine o'clock," said William, looking at his watch; " and our kind friend Mr. Gunthorpe is always punctual."

" What think you, dear, William, that he can mean," asked Angela, " by that expression in his note of yesterday, which bade us prepare for some strange revelations in respect to himself?"

" I cannot conceive, sweet sister," responded our hero. " But this I do know, and am rejoiced at——that in the same letter he emphatically repeated the assurance he gave me a little while ago, that you were to bid adieu to the stage."

" Ah! is he not benevolent? is he not good?" exclaimed Angela. " How is it that we have found so much favour in his sight?"

" He is one of those men," responded William, " who are delighted in doing good. I fear from certain expressions which he has at times let drop, that he has known much care and sorrow in past years: but instead of hardening his heart—instead of embittering his feelings against the world—whatsoever sufferings he has experienced, have only tended to enlarge his philanthropy. There are few men like Mr. Gunthrope, Angela: and there are few persons who like us, possess so dear and valued a friend."

" It is indeed a source of infinite congratulation for ourselves," rejoined Angela: then after a few moments' pause, she observed, " You were not long with Lady Florina to-day."

" No, dear sister—because she also was expecting a visit from Mr. Gunthorpe. He had intimated his intention of calling in Cavendish Square at about three o'clock; and it appeared that Lady Florina was likewise to hear something of importance relative to him. I therefore limited my visit. Besides, dear Angela, I do not choose to leave you too much alone. But, Ah! there is another point in Mr. Gunthorpe's note to us, which has given me the most unfeigned delight—I mean his promise that Lady Macdonald and Florina shall call upon you here to-morrow, to make your acquaintance and embrace you as my sister. This will indeed be a happiness for me! You will love Florina——"

" Yes—for your sake as well as for her own, dear William, I am sure that the object of your love must be one meriting the highest esteem and admiration."

" Oh, she is! she is!" cried Deveril enthusiastically: " she is one of the few flowers that do not sicken and wither in the tainted atmosphere of fashionable life."

" Ah, that wicked Lady Saxondale," said Angela, " to have spread such a story concerning you! But what course is now to be adopted with regard to her?"

" Doubtless Mr. Gunthorpe will inform us presently, " replied Deveril. "The matter rests entirely in his hands."

" Do you not wonder, William, how it is that our good old friend possesses such influence with Lady Macdonald? It must be as we have conjectured—that he is the very intimate friend of the Marquis of Eagledean."

" Yes—he himself has told me as much," replied Deveril. " But, Ah! here he is!" he ejaculated, as the sounds of carriage-wheels reached his ears through the open casement.

The brother and sister rose from their seats, and hastened to the front door to meet the visitor, who proved to be the individual whom they were expecting. There were kind greetings and grasping of hands—and in a few moments the nobleman was seated between William and Angela in the elegantly furnished parlour. Now that the light of the lamp shone upon his features, they were both surprised as well as rejoiced to observe that he had an altered look,—but a look that was changed for the better, it was an expression of countenance indicative of heartfelt satisfaction and joy.

"Ah! my dear young friends," he said, smiling upon them both, "you doubtless perceive some little alteration in me?—and it is so. Thank heaven, I find myself destined, in my declining years, to experience a happiness which for a long, long time past I had never dared hope to enjoy."

"You, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Angela, her sweet musical voice being tremulous with emotions,—"who are always studying to do good to others, richly deserve whatsoever happiness has now become your lot."

"And believe me, my dear Angela," responded the nobleman, "that in my own felicity I shall not forget the pleasing duty of ensuring the felicity of others. First with regard to yourself, William," he continued, now specially addressing himself to our young hero : I must explain the measures which I have adopted to ensure your welfare. I have this day seen your Florina, and have told her many things with which she was previously unacquainted. Of some of those things her aunt Lady Macdonald was already aware, though she had kept them profoundly secret : but even she knew not all. Now they are both acquainted with everything that concerns me. In a few weeks, William, you shall conduct Florina to the altar. It is my purpose to settle upon you an income of two thousand a-year——"

"No, Mr. Gunthorpe—impossible! impossible!" exclaimed William, well neigh overwhelmed by his surprising munificence. "I could not thus become dependant on your bounty. Pardon me, my dear sir, for speaking thus frankly—you will not attribute it to ingratitude on my part——"

"I attribute it to the proper feeling which inspires you, my young friend; and I honour you for it. But it suits my purpose and my intentions to give you this income. I will tell you why. Florina has certain claims upon me—and it is to her that I make this bequest. But as I cannot endure the idea of a husband being dependant on his wife, I choose to settle the money upon you instead of upon herself. Why, my dear boy, if you mean to marry a young lady of her rank, you must have a suitable income : and as for your toiling to earn a livelihood, it must not be thought of. You shall pursue your studies by way of amusement—and that is all. Now, don't interrupt me—I am doing everything for the best; and perhaps I shall tell you something presently which will show you that Florina has a perfect right to expect all this at my hands."

"My dear sir, I am at a loss for words," said William, profoundly affected, yet still loth to give an assent to the pecuniary arrangements proposed,—"I know not how to express myself——"

"But I can understand all that you would say," interrupted his good old friend. "And now, Angela," he continued, turning towards the young lady, adown whose cheeks the tears of mingled joy and gratitude were trickling;—for great indeed was that joy, and fervid also was that gratitude which she experienced towards the noble-hearted philanthropist who was displaying such splendid munificence towards the brother: "now, dear Angela," he said, "one word relative to yourself. Your engagement at the Opera was for one season—and that season is over. I dare say you have already had an offer from the Manager to renew it for the following season—and doubtless plenty of offers from directors of the Continental Operas. But you will refuse each and all. At the same time you are not to be dependent upon your brother—although I know full well that everything he possesses is your's and everything you possess is reciprocally his. But he and Florina must have their income to themselves; and you shall have your's. So you will permit me to settle upon you five hundred a-year——"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," interrupted the young lady, "so much bounty on your part——"

"Do not say a word!" he cried. "I am rich—this you knew all along—but I am far richer than you ever imagined. Had not my own circumstances altered in another sense—as I will presently explain—I should have done much more for Florina, whereby you, William, would have been benefited. Ah! now I perceive that you both are simultaneously struck with the same suspicion—you have penetrated the secret I was about to reveal to your ears—you see that I am no longer plain and humble Mr. Gunthorpe——"

"No, my lord," said William Deveril; "you are—you must be—the Marquis of Eagledean himself!"

As he thus spoke, our young hero rose from his chair with a feeling of profound respect towards that good nobleman; while, on the other side, Angela sank upon her knees, and taking his hand, murmured, "My lord, we cannot love or revere you more than if you had remained as we had hitherto known you!"

"My dear young friends," exclaimed the Marquis, compelling William to resume his seat on one side, and Angela to rise from her knees on the other,—"I have studied the excellence of your dispositions—I have marked the purity of your lives—and even if my duty towards my niece Florina had not impelled me to bestow a fortune to enable her to become your wife, William, I should nevertheless have given yourself and your amiable sister a proof of my regard. And now listen to me, while I relate many strange things: for I purpose to keep no secrets from you, as henceforth you will be welcome and honoured guests at my dwelling, and there are beings beneath that roof to whom I long to present you."

The Marquis of Eagledean then proceeded to relate the history of his love for Lady Everton, and most of those details which are already known to the reader. But we need scarcely observe that he did *not* draw aside the veil from those lamentable circumstances which entered into the past career of his daughter Elizabeth Paton; and with these exceptions, he recapitulated all the facts which have occupied so many of the previous chapters of our narrative. William and Angela listened with feelings of the deepest interest; and when the Marquis had concluded, they proffered their congratulations on his altered position in life, now that he had found two children whom he loved, and was on the eve of being united to the object of his first and only affections.

"William," continued the Marquis, "there is one more subject on which we have to converse. I allude to those proceedings that we have threatened to take against Lady Saxondale. You are now aware that Lord Harold Staunton is my nephew. I more than fear—indeed, it is certain from what we already know—that this bad woman has contrived to obtain no small degree of influence over him. It is my duty as well as my wish to rescue him from the circle of her fascinations. But considering the empire which she must have gained over his heart, to have been enabled to make him her instrument in the endeavour to take away your life, it can only be by revealing her true character to him in the blackest dyes, that he may be weaned from his infatuation. I do not imagine that he is aware of the fact that she, for some deep and dark purposes of her own, was in correspondence with that dreadful character—the man Chiffin. It is necessary to ascertain for what purpose that man's services were required by her ladyship. Previous to leaving London, I sent a note to that man at the public-house in Agar Town, desiring him to let me know if anything new transpired in respect to Lady Saxondale, and telling him where he might send a letter to me. Of course I failed not to hint that his reward should be ample; and he was already had proofs that I am not niggard with my gold."

"And has he answered your lordship?" inquired Deveril: "have you heard anything from him?"

"This very afternoon, on my return home from Cavendish Square," replied the Marquis, "I found a note from Chiffin. In that scrawl he desires me, accompanied by yourself, to pay another visit to that den in Agar Town—to-morrow evening at nine o'clock—when he promises to have the most important information to communicate."

"Oh, my lord!" said Angela, over whose countenance a shade had fallen; "do you not fear to expose yourselves to the dangers of that horrible den, and to the possible treachery of that dreadful man?"

"My sweet girl," responded the Marquis, in a benevolent tone of reassurance and encouragement, "you have nothing to tremble for, either on the part of your brother or your old friend. The appointment is given for an hour when that place is frequented by a number of persons; and though they may be all bad characters, yet no outrage is ever attempted by a mixed company of that description. As for the man himself, money is his idol; and as he doubtless thinks that he will make a good thing out of me from first to last, he will not kill the goose in the hope of obtaining all the golden eggs at once. To-morrow," continued the Marquis, "Lady Macdonald and Florina will pay you a visit between two and three o'clock. At five my carriage will be here to fetch you both to dine with me at the Manor. I long to introduce you to Lady Everton—to Adolphus—to Elizabeth—and to Frank. Then, soon after eight, you and I, William, will repair to Agar Town. I shall devise some excuse: because no one at the Manor must be made acquainted with the real nature of the business we have in hand, or the place to which we are going. In respect to what concerns yourself and Lady Saxondale, William, we shall know how to act better after this interview with Chiffin to-morrow evening. The greater the mass of evidence we can accumulate against her, the more easily shall we reduce her to terms. My object, as you may now comprehend it, is a double one: namely, to rescue my nephew from her clutches—and likewise to compel her to contradict the foul calumny she has propagated in respect to yourself. We may then leave the vile bad woman to such chastisement as her own utter mortification will be certain to inflict. But as for this nephew of mine," added the Marquis, shaking his head gloomily, "from all I have seen and all I have heard, I deeply fear that he has become inveterate in the ways of vice and demoralization."

"Let us hope for the best, my lord," said Deveril. "You know that so far as I am concerned, I freely forgive him."

"Generous-hearted boy!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean: "I know that you have forgiven him long ago."

"And even if I had not," rejoined our hero, "it would be sufficient to have learnt that he is your lordship's nephew, to induce me to bury the past in oblivion.'

The Marquis of Eagledean now rose to take his departure; and the brother and sister accompanied him forth into the little garden in front of the house. There his lordship took leave of Angela, shaking her warmly by the hand; and she retreated into the dwelling—for she perceived that the Marquis desired to say a few words in private with her brother. And it was so: for the nobleman, taking Deveril's arm, led him slowly towards the gate,—saying in a subdued voice, "William, you are now acquainted with all that had taken place between myself and Lady Everton. The world will perhaps look upon her past conduct as frailty and levity—and upon mine as that of a seducer. Now, my dear boy, I have invited yourself and Angela to my house to-morrow: but if you have the slightest hesitation to bring your beautiful sister in contact——"

"My lord, not another word, I beseech you, upon this subject!" interrupted Deveril. "At five o'clock Angela and myself will be prepared to wait upon your lordship, and all those whom we may find beneath your roof."

The Marquis said not another word—but pressed Deveril's hand cordially, and entering his carriage, drove homeward.

CHAPTER XCIV.

LOVE AFFAIRS.

ABOUT four o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, Francis Paton might have been seen walking alone in a distant part of the grounds attached to Stamford Manor. He had sought the shadiest spot, not so much because the sun was still powerful—but because he wished to escape the notice of any person who might be roving about, and likewise to be left in the companionship of his own thoughts. The youth was full of a nervous anxiety: there was a flush upon his cheeks—the glitter of uneasy suspense in his eyes; and from time to time, when his ear caught a sound like that of an approaching footstep, he stopped and flung an eagerly penetrating look through the shrubs and evergreens in the direction of the mansion. Then, as he descried not the person whom he expected, he walked on again, murmuring to himself, "How long the interview lasts!"

Indeed, for an entire hour—since three o'clock—had Francis Paton been walking to and fro in that shady retreat; and the interval which had elapsed appeared to him at least thrice as long. Twenty times had he looked at his watch—twenty times had he stopped short to glance in the direction of the Manor, and again and again did he murmur, "How long the interview lasts!"

But at length he beheld his sister advancing hastily towards the spot where he was awaiting her arrival; and perceiving that she came quickly, and not with a slow languid pace, his heart bounded with hope: for he thought within himself that she had pleasing tidings to communicate. As she approached nearer still, he saw in her looks sufficient to confirm this anticipation and flying towards her, he exclaimed, "What news, dear Elizabeth? what does our father say?"

"We have both alike, my dear brother," she responded, "everything to hope."

A cry of joy burst from Frank's lips; and he embraced his sister with the warmest effusion of delight.

"Now tell me," he said, "everything that has taken place."

"Oh, then dear Frank," she replied archly, and yet with a softly blushing confusion at the same time, "you will now have patience to listen everything that I may have to say?"

"Yes," he answered; "provided that you have nothing of a disagreeable nature to qualify the joyous intelligence already communicated.

"I do not think you will find it so," she rejoined. "But first, dear Frank. I will speak of your own little love-affair. Come, let me take your arm—and we will walk to and fro beneath this grateful shade. I represented to our father frankly and candidly everything which had taken place between yourself and Miss Juliana Farefield, as you had previously related it all to me——"

"You told his lordship everything?" murmured Frank, half-averting his blushing countenance.

"Oh, yes! did we not agree, when I undertook to become spokeswoman in the matter, that our father was to be dealt with frankly and unreservedly? Well then, my dear brother, I told him all; and at first he looked very grave and very serious, for more reasons than one——"

"And those reasons? asked young Paton quickly.

"The first, as he explained them to me," continued Elizabeth, "was because he could not help thinking that it was a mere transient passion on Juliana's part: but yet he admitted that he might be mistaken."

"Oh! yes—he is mistaken!" ejaculated Frank vehemently: 'for I know that she loves me; and were it not an egregious vanity on my part to use such terms, I should say that she loves me devotedly—adoringly?"

"So much the better, Frank—inasmuch as you, my dear brother, are so deeply enamoured of her. That however was one reason which made the Marquis look grave. The second is, because he has no reason to entertain any good feeling towards Juliana's mother, Lady Saxondale. On the contrary, there are certain circumstances, which he partly explained to me, and which have not only brought him already in collision with her, but now threaten to make a still wider breach between them. These circumstances relative to his nephew, Lord Harold—and to Mr. William Deveril, whom you have often seen, and who is coming to dine here to-day."

"But no matter for the circumstances, my dear sister," exclaimed Frank impatiently, "so long as our father has not placed his negative——"

"No, my dear brother—I have already assured you to the contrary. Now listen to what the Marquis says. He himself has experienced too bitterly the fatal effects of thwarting the heart's affections, to entertain the slightest idea of attempting a similar coercion with either of his children, No, no—he will not do that——not for worlds would he adopt a course by which he himself and our dear mother were rendered such cruel sufferers. He would rather strain many a point—rather make much sacrifice of feeling as a parent, than practise such tyranny, such cruelty. This therefore does he propose—that you shall put Juliana Farefield's love to the test: he himself will suggest the means, and sketch forth the plan to be adopted; and in three or four days shall you repair into Lincolnshire for the purpose."

"Oh, that condition I cheerfully accept!" exclaimed Frank; "and I feel deeply grateful to our father—

deeply grateful to you also, my dearest sister——"

"No gratitude to me, Frank," interrupted Elizabeth. "Heaven grant that the result of the test, whatsoever it may be, shall prove in accordance with your hopes and aspirations! The reason that made me so long ere I rejoined you here, was because our father—after he had heard all that I had to say, both on your account and my own—proceeded to the drawing-room to consult our mother. Ah! you may suppose that during the twenty minutes I was left alone in the library, I endured some degree of suspense both for your sake and mine. And yet hope preponderated above fear: for the Marquis had listened to me with so much benevolence—with so much paternal kindness—he had encouraged me in such gentle and soothing terms to proceed each time I hesitated——in short, I saw full well that he would do all in his power to minster unto our happiness."

"And you were not mistaken, Elizabeth?" exclaimed Frank. "But in reference to yourself——"

"Our father will grant Don Diego Christoval an interview the day after to-morrow," answered Miss Paton, the rich blood again mantling upon her cheeks; "and I do not think there is any reason to apprehened an unsatisfactory termination to that meeting. To-morrow evening, you know, dear Frank," continued Elizabeth, speaking more seriously, "the hands of our father and mother will be united in the holy bond of marriage. The special license is already procured—the various arrangements are made. But these indeed are few, inasmuch as the ceremony will take place with the utmost privacy. Perhaps this marriage may be followed shortly by several others——"

"Oh!" cried Frank, in the sanguine enthusiasm of youthful years, "how delightful would it be if Adolphus and Henrietta—yourself and the Count—and, and——"

"Speak it out, my dear brother," said Elizabeth, with a smile upon her lips and a blush upon her cheeks: "Juliana and yourself——if we were all to be married on the same day——Well, we shall see."

"And now, dear sister, that you have at length learned what love is," continued Frank, "tell me, does it not constitute a new existence? is it not a paradise in itself? does it not seem to transport one, as it were, into another state of being? Oh, you who but so short a time back were almost boasting that your heart was inaccessible to love——why, I do really believe that all along, from the very first moment you ever beheld your handsome Christoval in the Catalonian hills, you really loved him: that is to say, the germs of love were engendered in your heart—but the circumstances not being congenial for their expansion and growth, they remained as it were latent, unknown, unsuspected—but not the less surely implanted there; and it only required a change of circumstances, such as those under which you and Don Diego recently met, to evoke these germs of love into active vitality and a recognised existence."

"There may be some truth in what you say, Frank," observed Elizabeth, in a subdued voice: "yes—there may be!"—and for a few moments she reflected profoundly upon the idea which he had suggested: then suddenly raising her magnificent dark eyes which had been bent downward, she exclaimed with her wonted blitheness, "Come, Frank, we must hasten and dress for dinner. The Deverils and the Leydens are coming—and it will be a happy party."

The brother and sister sped back to the mansion; and it was indeed a happy party which was gathered in the splendid drawing-room at about six o'clock. William Deveril, who had seen Frank in his page's livery at Saxondale House, could not help thinking that handsome as he had looked *then*, he appeared to far greater advantage in his present elegant evening costume; and he shook hands with him in a manner so ingenuously cordial and warm, that it was as much as to imply the words, "We are bosom friends from this moment."

Angela,—who, in a plain white dress, looked ravishingly beautiful,—was heartily welcomed by Lady Everton; and she was soon on the most friendly terms with Elizabeth Paton and Henrietta Leyden. And here we may observe that it would have been difficult, if all England were searched through, to discover three more perfect specimens of female loveliness than Elizabeth, Angela, and Henrietta—or two handsomer youths than William Deveril and Francis Paton. But Adolphus —did he not also appear to advantage? Yes: and wonderfully improved was he alike in personal appearance and the tone of his intellect. Mrs. Leyden and little Charley were amongst the guests; and the sweet boy was full of the most joyous spirits. Altogether, we repeat, it was indeed a happy party.

Soon after eight o'clock the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril entered the carriage, which was in readiness, and which drove away in the direction of Agar Town.

"And so Florina and Angela at once became as affectionate as two sisters," observed the Marquis referring to some conversation which had already taken place between himself and William Deveril in the course of the evening.

"Angela was delighted with Florina," answered our hero: "indeed, how could she be otherwise? for the heart which is all amiable and pure, is certain to love a being who is herself amiability and purity."

"No doubt of it," said the Marquis. "I was convinced they would immediately experienced a fondness for one another. Florina was already much prepossessed in favour of your sister, and of course Angela was equally prepared to love the object of your affection. But Lady Macdonald—what think you of her?"

"Her ladyship was most amiable," replied William. "Altogether, both Angela and myself had every cause to be pleased and flattered by the visit. We are to dine in Cavendish Square the day after to-morrow."

"I know it: for we are to be there to meet you," replied his lordship. "Lady Everton will in the meanwhile have become Marchioness of Eagledean. Elizabeth and Adolphus will also be of the party."

"And Frank—your amiable son Frank?" asked William.

"He is going upon a journey, of which I will tell you more particulars another time. By the bye, I thought I had something to communicate, which perhaps is of more or less consequence; but whether it will prove so, we shall see. That woman whom you rescued from drowning, and who is to call at your residence in the evening of the 21st of this month, at nine o'clock——is it not so?"

"Yes, my lord: it was in the evening of the 21st of July that she gave the appointment that day month, hour for hour——Oh! I have not forgotten it: and often and often do I ask myself what secret she may have to reveal? or whether it were not all the outpouring of a half-crazed brain?"

"No—I do not think so," interrupted the Marquis. "From the particulars you narrated to me, I am inclined to anticipate that she will really have something of importance to communicate. But I was about to tell you something more concerning her. It happened that this afternoon my daughter Elizabeth had a conversation with me on certain matters regarding Frank, and in the course of what took place, she mentioned several little things which had occurred at Saxondale House during the last few weeks of his residence there. Amongst those occurrences, were certain visits paid under very mysterious circumstances to Lady Saxondale, by a woman precisely answering the description of that same person whom you rescued from the River Trent."

"Ah! then doubtless she was on her way at the time to pay a visit to the Castle," exclaimed William Deveril. "I recollect that she spoke a great deal of Lady Saxondale. How peremptorily she demanded what I was doing in that neighbourhood! and how strangely she told me that if I myself had been to the Castle, it was somewhat important she should know it! I remember also that when I told her I had never set foot in Saxondale Castle in my life, she gave vent to such singular ejaculations, and looked at me with an expression of countenance that I never can forget. I besought her to explain herself: I told her that she was torturing me cruelly —that by her looks and her language she was piling up mystery upon mystery; and yet she would not relieve me from suspense. But this was not all. When I spoke of those overtures which Lady Saxondale had made to me, she adjured me in the most solemn manner to tell her the truth—whether I had really rejected them? Then how suddenly satisfied and even pleased did she seem when I gave her a positive answer!"

"It is strange—most strange," said the Marquis of Eagledean, in a musing tone. "No conjecture can possibly penetrate that woman's meaning, or fathom the mystery. But still those visits which she paid to Saxondale House—for there can be no mistake as to the identity of the woman whom Frank saw, with that of the woman of whom you are speaking,—those visits, I say, would seem to show that she has some intimate knowledge of Lady Saxondale's affair's; and hence her preseverance in questioning you. Yes, William—there is evidently some profound and important secret which your poor father vainly endeavoured to reveal on his death-bed—which the manager Thompson was likewise acquainted with—and of which this singular woman has some inkling. Well, the 21st is not very far distant now; and then we shall see whether the woman will keep the appointment I have promised to be with you at the time, my dear William—and I shall not fail. But here we are at the spot where I bade the coachman halt."

END OF VOL XI.

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